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Palestinians protest against arrests by PLO

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (R) — Hundreds of Palestinians protested outside a jail in Bethlehem on Saturday where they said the PLO was holding eight political detainees, witnesses said. The protesters said Palestinian police arrested the eight, identified with the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, two weeks ago. "My brother has been held for 13 days without charges. We want to halt political arrests," said protester Shibli Al Qaissi. Israeli security sources said the PLO arrested the eight after petrol bombs were thrown earlier this month at an Israeli patrol near Beit Jala in the West Bank. The Palestine Liberation Organisation took over control of most West Bank cities late last year under the terms of its self-rule deal with Israel signed last September.

Premier receives Dutch minister

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti on Saturday met with Dutch Minister of International Cooperation and Development Jan Prong and reviewed with him means of enhancing Jordanian-Dutch relations. Mr. Kabariti briefed the Dutch official on the economic situation in the Middle East region in the era following the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty and the Palestinian-Israeli agreements, stressing the need to have a comprehensive economic development process. Mr. Kabariti als outlined Jordan's support for the Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in economic and political fields. The Jordanian and Dutch sides reviewed developments on the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli peace tracks, and Mr. Kabariti underlined the need to achieve progress on those two tracks. Earlier in the day, Dr. Prong was received by Minister of Planning Rima Khalaf and the two ministers discussed bilateral ties and means of bolstering them.

Balkan leaders start crucial summit in Rome

ROME (AFP) — The Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian presidents began a two-day summit here Saturday with the international community intent on extracting a renewed commitment to the sliding Dayton accords.

The talks, attended by Alija Izetbegovic of Bosnia, Croatia's Franjo Tudjman and Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic and chaired by Italian Foreign Minister Susanna Agnelli, had been hastily convened to arrest a potentially disastrous slide in the two-month-old peace agreement.

Together with their negotiating teams and a specially-enlarged eight-nation "contact group," the three men sat round the conference table shortly after 3:00 p.m. (1400 GMT) with the chastening words of international leaders ringing in their ears.

Ms. Agnelli urged the Balkan leaders to meet the expectations of the international community and comply fully with the agreement they signed in Paris in December.

"Freedom of movement has to be granted, rules to deal with detainees have to be worked out, exchanges of prisoners have to be fully carried out," she said, outlining the key obstacles to peace in her opening remarks to the conference.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke expressed optimism about the peace process saying that although there have been difficulties in implementing the accord the overall conflict had stopped.

"If peace has not fully reached Bosnia, there is no more war," he said.

Before the conference went into an extended closed session — from which it is not due to emerge until Sunday afternoon — Mr. Holbrooke said progress since the peace agreement was signed by the three presidents in Paris in December "has been remarkable."

He sought to play down the difficulties dogging the process, saying they had been "anticipated."

Those difficulties — the main focus on the two-day session — centre around getting Bosnian Serbs to renew contact with the NATO-led multinational force, IFOR, and winning Croat approval for European Union plans for the reunification of Mostar.

The international community, led by the Americans, is intent on wringing a renewed commitment to the Dayton agreement from the assembled principals.

Discussions were due to continue into late Saturday and throughout Sunday in bilateral or multilateral meetings between the various participants.

EU representative Carl Bildt warned that Bosnia's new-found confidence "is a fragile thing. It will be undermined if all of the leaders from all the sides did not participate fully in the process of national reconciliation."

"The international community also has a duty to support the process," he told the conference, attended also by members of the "contact group" — Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, enlarged to include Canada, Italy and Spain.

"There has to be an economic reconstruction programme to underpin the political reintegration of the country," Mr. Bildt said, touching on the international community's great leverage in its dealings with the former foes.

The Americans and Europeans have threatened to pull the plug on promised reconstruction aid if the former belligerents fail to keep the peace on track.

In the case of the Bosnian Serbs, widely regarded as the most recalcitrant of the factions, that means renewing contacts with IFOR and mixed commissions as a first step.

They broke off relations last week in protest at the arrest of two of their senior officers, now in The Hague awaiting questioning for alleged war crimes.

Added to that, the bitter standoff in Mostar is a rolling snowball which could engulf the already shaky Muslim-Croat Federation, established under U.S. auspices in March 1994.

Croats are refusing to countenance an EU plan to unify the city, divided between Croats and Muslims.

Participants at the Rome crisis conference are only too well aware that these bumps on the road must be levelled as quickly as possible if the international community is to take proper advantage of the U.S.-backed military muscle on the ground, which is pledged only for the remainder of the year.

ORTLIEB IN ACTION DURING MEN'S DOWNHILL: Former Olympic champion Patrick Ortlieb of Austria skis down the Veleta course during the men's downhill race at the Alpine Skiing World Championships Saturday. Ortlieb won the race for his first world title (Reuters photo)

Kabariti assures Khalifa of Jordan's backing for Bahrain

MANAMA (Agencies) — Jordan Saturday reaffirmed its absolute support for Bahrain in its drive to ensure security and stability in the wake of anti-government riots and acts of sabotage over the past two months.

The reaffirmation was contained in a letter Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti sent to his Bahraini counterpart Sheikh Khalifa Ben Salman Al Khalifa. The letter was delivered by Jordan's Ambassador to Bahrain Shaker Arabiyat, the Jordan News Agency, Petra, reported.

The message, a reply to one from Sheikh Khalifa in which he congratulated Mr. Kabariti on forming the government, reiterated Jordan's unwavering backing to the island state and its support of the measures taken by the Bahraini government to ensure security and stability in the country, Dr. Arabiyat said after delivering the message.

Sheikh Khalifa was quoted in the past week as saying that his government was determined to confront riots and maintain security.

He was speaking following a blast last Sunday at a hotel in Manama, the second to hit a hotel in less than a month and the third in the capital since Dec. 31.

At least 13 civilians and three policemen were reported killed in Muslim Shi'ite-led protests which first erupted in 1994 to demand the restoration of a parliament dissolved in 1975 and the release of political prisoners.

Sheikh Sa'ad optimistic about ties with Jordan

KUWAIT (R) — Kuwait's Crown Prince on Saturday voiced optimism about Jordan's drive to mend ties with the Gulf state after they deteriorated during Iraq's 1990-91 occupation of the Gulf state.

"I am optimistic about the exchange of messages (with Crown Prince Hassan)," the official Kuwait News Agency quoted Sheikh Sa'ad Al Abdullah Al Sabah as saying at a meeting with the chief editors of local newspapers.

Commenting on a recent exchange of messages with Prince Hassan, Sheikh Sa'ad said: "They (Prince Hassan's messages) entailed good intentions."

"The Arab Nation is undergoing critical circumstances, that require from us — Kuwaiti officials — to work for boosting Arab ranks, and to overlook any (negative) position taken by any sisterly state," he said.

Diplomats say the exchange was a significant sign because Sheikh Sa'ad, also prime minister, had long opposed resuming ties with Arab states that sympathised with Iraq during the occupation.

However, Sheikh Sa'ad called on Amman to take further "positive steps that would translate words into deeds serving the interest of both states," the agency reported.

Sheikh Sa'ad has often said Jordan must in some way acknowledge it erred by sympathising with Iraq after its troops invaded Kuwait in 1990.

Sheikh Sa'ad maintained that Kuwait's position towards Amman's attempts at reconciliation was not dictated by others.

Washington, Kuwait's main ally, has encouraged Gulf states to resume ties with Jordan.

Kuwait's ties with Jordan have improved since last year when Jordan gave asylum to two Iraqi defectors.

Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah later met then Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdul Karim Al Kabariti on two occasions and unofficial exchanges were stepped up.

Sheikh Sa'ad said his country would act positively towards any similar bid from other friends of Baghdad.

"If the states that supported Iraq in its aggression against us expressed their desire to come closer towards Kuwait, we shall not place hurdles."

Prince Hassan, according to Kuwaiti reports, has offered to help secure the release of about 600 Kuwaitis said to be held in Iraq since Kuwait's 1990-91 occupation despite Baghdad's denial.

Commenting on the Jordanian offer, Sheikh Sa'ad said: "I think that Jordan has many means and tools towards this end... We wish them luck."

King calls on PSD chief

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Hussein accompanied by Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti Saturday called at the Public Security Department (PSD) and met its newly appointed chief Nasouh Mohieddin and his senior assistants. The King's visit came two days after Major General Mohieddin was appointed to the post succeeding Lieutenant General Abdul Rahman Adwan who retired from active service. The King had approved the appointment which was taken by the council of ministers.

Jordanian 'peace' baby named Yitzhak Rabin

AMMAN (AFP) — A jubilant Jordanian father has named his baby son Yitzhak Rabin, after the late Israeli prime minister who struck a peace treaty with Jordan in October 1994. "I have always hoped for a boy to be named Yitzhak Rabin after the man I cherish," Rajai Abdul Qader, 40, from Irbid, 88 kilometres north of Amman, told the weekly Al Mashreq on Saturday. His desire to name the infant after Mr. Rabin who was a "martyr to peace" increased after the premier was gunned down at a Tel Aviv rally on Nov. 4 by a Jewish fanatic, Mr. Abdul Qader said His son was the "first Arab child to be named after Rabin. I would like Israelis to take similar steps toward naming their children after Arab peace-makers."

Egypt jails 6 Israelis

CAIRO (R) — An Egyptian court on Saturday sentenced five Israelis to six months in prison for trying to smuggle weapons and ammunition out of Egypt, security sources said. The state security court in Suez on the Red Sea also fined each of the defendants 500 pounds ($147), the sources said. The court heard that the Israelis had been arrested in the Egyptian town of Taba, on the border with Israel, after police found three pistols, two rifles and ammunition in their car.

2 Algerian media executives killed

PARIS (R) — Suspected Muslim radicals in Algeria burst into a local news agency in the east of the country on Saturday and shot dead the director and his assistant, an official security statement announced.

Four gunmen shot dead the agency's director and his assistant, a 25-year-old woman, inside their offices in the town of Tizi-Ouzou, 90 kilometres southeast of Algiers, said the statement carried by the Algerian official media.

The statement named the two as Achour Belghazli, 40, and Dalila Drideche, 25 years.

They are among more than 60 journalists and media employees killed in Algeria in the past 32 months in attacks blamed by the authorities on Muslim guerrillas locked in a four-year-old vicious conflict with the Algerian government.

Three journalists were among 18 people killed in a car bomb attack last Sunday outside Algiers' Maison de la Presse press centre where the country's main newspapers are headquartered.

Up to 50,000 people have been killed in the North African country's violence since early 1992 when authorities cancelled a general elections which the Islamists were poised to win.

President Liamine Zeroual, who won a big victory in Algeria's first pluralist presidential poll in November, has vowed to reshape the country's fraying political structures through dialogue while continuing to fight Muslim rebels.

Meanwhile, the Algerian authorities detained the editor of one of the country's newspapers on Saturday after he appeared in court over a commentary he had written about the civil strife blighting the country.

In a statement received by Reuters, the Arab language weekly Al Chourouk Al Arabi said its editor Saad Bouokba was in detention at Algier's high security Sarkaadji Prison.

The newspaper said the arrest of Mr. Bouokba was "an attack on the freedom of speech and the press."

Iraq says deal with U.N. possible by Monday

UNITED NATIONS (AFP) — The Iraqi chief negotiator at oil-for-food talks expressed hope Saturday that the first round of negotiations with the United Nations, which could lead to Iraq resuming oil exports, could conclude soon.

Asked by reporters here whether the current technical talks could end by Monday, delegation chief, Abdul Amir Al Anbari replied: "Let's hope so."

The talks which started on Feb. 6 are focusing on U.N. Resolution 986, under which Baghdad would be allowed to export $1 billion worth of oil per quarter to raise money for humanitarian supplies, under international control.

Iraq has been under a U.N. sanctions regime since Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

Mr. Anbari confirmed that the two sides were working on a "memorandum of understanding" although nothing had yet been finalised. The document would deal with "all aspects" of the resolution which sets out strict conditions for the limited oil sales and the use of the oil revenues.

The United Nations issued a statement saying that Saturday's morning sessions focused on "technical issues related to banking, oil sales and distribution" of food and medical supplies to the Iraqi people.

Israel approves list of 154 PNC members; Hawatmeh asks to return

EAST JERUSALEM (Agencies) — Israel has approved a list of 154 members of the Palestine National Council (PNC) seeking to come to the Palestinian territories to participate in a vote on amending the PLO charter, a PLO official said on Saturday.

"Israel has approved the names of 154 PNC members," Jamil Al Tarifi, the head of the civil coordination committee with Israel, told Reuters.

"We have submitted a new list for their approval," he said.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres said last month Israel would allow any of the 450 members of PNC still abroad — including staunch anti-Israel guerrillas — to return to the West Bank and Gaza to amend clauses in the PLO charter that call for the Jewish state's destruction.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat promised in his latest deal with Israel last September to change the charter — drafted by the PNC 30 years ago — two months after convening the Palestinian legislative council, elected in a national poll last month.

Mr. Peres has said he would halt peace talks with the Palestine Liberation Organisation if Mr. Arafat failed to keep his commitment.

PLO officials have begun preparing for a meeting of the PNC — until now considered the Palestinians' parliament in exile — but its deputy-speaker, Salim Al Zaanoun, has said the meeting might have to wait until after Israeli elections which are about three months away.

Members of the PNC include George Habbash and Nayef Hawatmeh, leaders of two radical Palestinian groups responsible for some of the deadliest guerrilla attacks against Israelis. Both are based in Damascus.

Mr. Hawatmeh on Saturday officially asked Mr. Arafat that he be allowed to return to the Palestinian territories, a senior representative said.

Mr. Hawatmeh, who heads the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) was on a list with 25 others handed to Mr. Arafat by Abdul Hamid Abu Jiyab, a member of the DFLP central committee.

"I presented a request on this to Arafat on Saturday morning," Mr. Abu Jiyab told AFP, adding he had also handed over a list of 25 other DFLP officials with membership of the PNC.

Mr. Abu Jiyab, accompanied by two other DFLP members, also gave Mr. Arafat a further list bearing the names of "115 leaders and officials of this organisation who wish to return to the Palestinian territories."

The issue of Mr. Hawatmeh's return was recently discussed in talks between Mr. Arafat and Mr. Peres, he added.

On Wednesday the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), George Habash, reversed an earlier decision and asked to be allowed to return.

Under Palestinian-Israeli accords a meeting of the PNC is due to be held two months after the first session of the new self-rule council elected on January 20.

Late Friday a Palestinian official said the autonomy council would meet between March 7 and 10.

Qatar: Rift with GCC resolved

DOHA (R) — Qatar said Saturday it had patched up a rift with its Gulf Arab allies over the appointment of a secretary-general for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) after mediation by Oman.

"Qatar will participate in the ministerial meeting in March in Riyadh and host the GCC summit in Doha in December," a senior official at the ministry of foreign affairs said.

"The matter has been resolved in a brotherly spirit and we thank our Omani brothers very much for taking the initiative."

Qatar's emir, Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifa Al Thani, boycotted the closing session of the GCC summit in Muscat last December to protest at the way Saudi Arabia's Jameel Al Hujilan was appointed secretary-general instead of Qatar's candidate who had been tipped for the job several months before.

Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Ben Jassim Ben Jabr Al Thani later threatened to boycott any GCC meeting attended by Mr. Hujilan.

Mr. Hujilan is due to take over in mid-March as new chief of the GCC — grouping Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

Oman's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Youssef Ben Alawi Ben Abdullah toured GCC states last week to resolve the dispute ahead of Mr. Hujilan's taking office.

"Now, we have no problem in attending the GCC meetings," said the Qatari official, who declined to elaborate on the elements of the compromise.

Premier: Government seeking greater private sector role

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti said Saturday that the government was seeking to increase the participation of the private sector in various economic and financial fields.

The private sector is called on to help end imbalances in the national economy particularly in marketing, the prime minister said at a meeting with representatives of the private sector held at the Ministry of Planning.

"We cannot continue talking about liberating the market while voices are raised demanding government intervention in marketing processes," said Mr. Kabariti. He added that the government and the private sector ought to benefit from the past experiences in this regard.

"For the national economy to progress coordination and close cooperation between the private and the public sectors are inevitable," Mr. Kabariti said.

He said his government would soon submit to Parliament a draft law on ending monopolies and would revise the formation of economic councils which should play their role in the process of coordination and consultation between the private and public sectors.

Referring to relations with other Arab states, the prime minister said that Jordan had always shown keenness towards unified Arab ranks on various political and economic issues.

Discussion during the meeting focused on the Jordanian-European partnership, legislation required for liberalising the Jordanian market and ending monopoly and ways to maximise benefits from partnership between the private and public sectors.

Also discussed were the outcome of the Amman Economic Summit and the need for re-examining projects and proposals submitted to the conference.

Minister of Planning Rima Khalaf told the attendees that she was planning a series of meetings with the private sector for continued discussions on its role in the national economy.

Turkish parties need more time for coalition accord

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey's political leaders Mesut Yilmaz and Necmettin Erbakan agreed in principle Saturday to form a coalition government including Muslim fundamentalists but said they needed another meeting Sunday to finalise the accord.

Mr. Yilmaz said there were no problems left between his conservative Motherland Party and Mr. Erbakan's pro-Islamic Welfare Party. If the agreement is confirmed it would propel the Muslim fundamentalists to power for the first time in the modern history of this secular nation.

Mr. Yilmaz added that there were no differences between the two parties over who would be the first prime minister, confirming press reports that he would hold the premiership first.

"We agreed on the principle, but we need another meeting," he said after meeting for three hours with Mr. Erbakan.

"We must meet again and if God wills it, we will reach a solution," Mr. Erkaban added at a joint news conference.

Mr. Erbakan said he hoped a final agreement would be reached at Sunday's meeting so that committees from both parties could convene and prepare a coalition protocol.

Turkish state television had showed Mr. Yilmaz and Mr. Erbakan beaming as they headed into parliament shortly after 1100 GMT to start discussions. They made no comment.

This was their third meeting in four days. After their meeting Thursday, the leaders said they were making progress towards an agreement.

Turkey has been without a proper government since December, when elections failed to give any one party a majority in parliament.

Turkish commentators expect the two parties will be able to form a coalition government to succeed that of Tansu Ciller of the True Path Party. They could not, however, rule out a last-minute breakdown in talks.

Ms. Ciller has been running a caretaker administration since elections in December failed to give one party a parliamentary majority.

The Welfare Party polled the most seats with 158 deputies in the 550-seat parliament. True Path won 135 seats and the Motherland Party 133.

Mr. Erbakan, 69, who only dropped his virulent anti-Western stance after the election, is an anathema to Turkey's republicans. He would be the first Islamic Turkish prime minister in 73 years.

Mr. Yilmaz, 48, is believed to have argued that Turkish public opinion was "not ready" to accept an Islamic leader of the secular country. However, on Wednesday, both parties said they had reached agreement in principle for a rotating premiership of six months or a year, with Mr. Yilmaz taking first turn.

The talks resumed Saturday after both parties held meetings of their executive bodies on Friday.

Turkey's President Suleyman Demirel asked Mr. Yilmaz to form a government on Feb. 3, after Ms. Ciller threw in the towel. She had ruled out any alliance with Mr. Yilmaz after hopes of a coalition foundered over their personal rivalry.

Ms. Ciller, on Thursday, made a last-ditch effort to stave off Islamic rule with a plea to Mr. Yilmaz not to ally himself with Mr. Erbakan.

"Don't plunge yourself, your party and Turkey into obscurity, or you will crush under this burden," Ms. Ciller said in a speech to her party.

Also Thursday, the pro-Ciller mass circulation daily Sabah carried a message to Mr. Yilmaz on its front page, urging him not to sell out the secular republic for the prime minister's chair.

The newspaper also reminded its readers of some of Mr. Yilmaz's quotes during the election campaign, in which he swore never to ally himself with Mr. Erbakan, whom he had branded a "danger" to the country.

Even last week, Mr. Yilmaz ruled out a coalition with Mr. Erbakan, after castigating him for having eulogised the Iranian fundamentalist revolution.

The political impasse appears to have changed his mind, however.

According to leaks in the Turkish press Thursday, Mr. Yilmaz appears to have succeeded in winning over Mr. Erbakan, who until now has argued his victory in the Dec. 24 elections should give him the sole right to head the new government.

Mr. Demirel is empowered to dissolve parliament and call early elections if no government is formed within 45 days from Feb. 6, when the parliament speaker's office was formed.

Turkey's Islamist Welfare Party (RP) leader Necmettin Erbakan (right) said Saturday it was close to a power-sharing deal with conservatives, after a third round of talks with Motherland Party leader Mesut Yilmaz (left). Mr. Erbakan vowed to work through a Muslim religious holiday to seal the pact to form Turkey's next government (Reuters photo)

New campaign of militant violence strikes southern Egypt

ASSIUT, Egypt (AFP) — Egypt's main armed opposition group, the Islamic Jamaa Islamiyah, has launched a new campaign of attacks in its southern stronghold of Asyut, killing three policemen, officials said Saturday.

Police arrested 13 Muslim fundamentalists after Jamaa Islamiyah militants killed the policemen and wounded another in three separate attacks on Friday in the Asyut region.

The dead policemen included a colonel and a lieutenant colonel, the highest ranking officials to be killed by the militants since July 1995, the officials said. "These are revenge attacks by Jamaa Islamiyah" after the deaths on Tuesday of two of their leaders during a police raid in the Sohag region (500 kilometres south of Cairo), a police official told AFP.

The interior ministry said the two men were linked to the bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad in November.

One of the two killed, Mahmud Al Walidi, was "the number two in Jamaa in southern Egypt," a police official said.

The attack against the two senior police officers was led by the military chief of Jamaa, Rifaat Zidan, a 26-year-old former student wanted by police since 1992.

"Several important leaders of Jamaa still live in the Asyut region ... and they hide in the mountains along the Nile River and the Badari prairies, which are both difficult for the police to enter," the official said.

Asyut was the main stronghold of Muslim militants waging a campaign to topple the government of President Hosni Mubarak, but a police crackdown at the end of 1994 chased them into the neighbouring province of Minya.

Since then Minya has been the focus of the main attacks.

But late Friday Jamaa militants entered the home late Friday of a municipal guard in an Asyut village near Badari, 400 kilometres south of Cairo, shooting and killing him.

The Islamic militants also fired machine guns at police standing guard outside the court house in Badari, injuring one of the officers before escaping, officials said. Municipal guards act as an auxiliary to police in the countryside.

Earlier Friday Muslim militants also shot and killed two police officers and wounded three civilians outside a shop in the Asyut town of Sahel Selim, 400 kilometres south of Cairo.

The incidents brought the number of deaths in nearly four years of anti-government violence to 962.

Egypt court jails 5 Israelis for possession of arms

CAIRO (R) — An Egyptian court on Thursday sentenced five Israelis to six months in prison for trying to smuggle weapons and ammunition out of Egypt, security sources said on Saturday.

The State Security Court in Suez on the Red Sea also fined each of the defendants 500 pounds ($147), the sources said.

The court heard that the Israelis had been arrested in the Egyptian town of Taba, on the border with Israel, after police found three pistols, two rifles and ammunition in their car.

Police in Taba said the Israelis did not have a licence for the arms.

The defendants, who had been on holiday in the Sinai peninsula, said they had bought the arms from bedouins there.

Sudan offers reward for suspects in Mubarak attack

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Sudan offered a reward on Saturday for information leading to the arrest of three Muslim militants implicated in a failed attempt to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Sudanese Interior Minister Bakri Hassan Saleh, cited by the daily Al Ingaz Al Watani, offered a "large" reward but did not give details of the sum involved.

He urged local and regional authorities in Sudan to help search for the three Egyptian suspects accused of involvement in the failed attack on Mr. Mubarak in Addis Ababa in June 1995.

Sudan has denied sheltering the three, but earlier this month the United Nations Security Council ordered Sudan to extradite them to Ethiopia within 60 days.

Ethiopia has decribed an arrest warrant for the three issued by the authorities in Khartoum as a "joke" and insisted the sudanese government knew very well where the men were.

Afghan FM in Iran for peace talks

TEHRAN (AFP) — Afghan Foreign Minister Najibullah Lafrai arrived in Iran on Saturday for talks aimed at ending the civil war in his country, the official Iranian news agency IRNA reported.

The agency said Mr. Lafrai was here to take part in a trilateral meeting with Iran and Pakistan. But the Iranian foreign ministry told AFP that no meeting would take place directly between Pakistan and Afghan officials, and the talks would be through Iranian intermediaries. Iranian deputy foreign minister, Alaeddin Borujerdi, quoted by IRNA, said Pakistan Foreign Secretary Najmuddin Sheikh was also due here later Saturday for the discussions.

IRNA said Wednesday that Mr. Sheikh and his Afghan counterpart would hold talks on improving their countries' strained relations.

But a Pakistan foreign ministry spokesman ruled out on Thursday the possibility of Mr. Sheikh meeting with any Kabul government representatives during his two-day stay in Tehran.

He stressed the talks here had been scheduled with Iranian officials only. "There is no question of meeting with any representative" of President Burhanuddin Rabbani's government in Kabul," the spokesman said.

The beleaguered Afghan government has accused Islamabad of supporting the Islamic Taliban militia, which has beseiged Kabul over the past four months, seeking to topple Mr. Rabbani.

Israel's closure dampens Palestinians' holiday mood

By Said Ghazali
Associated Press

AMARI REFUGEE CAMP, West Bank — Walid Abu Shilbaya is not looking forward to next week's Eid Al Fitr holiday. As he sees it, there is little reason to do so.

The Palestinian plumber can't get to his job. As a result, he's broke and will have to disappoint his seven children who expect the traditional date cookies, new clothes and a family outing for the holiday.

On Wednesday, when his 13-year-old son, Mahmoud, asked for five shekels ($1.50) for a traditional holiday haircut, he told the boy curtly: "Do it another time."

Mr. Abu Shilbaya's problems are not unique. Israel locked out 2 million Palestinians when it closed the West Bank and Gaza Strip Monday night out of fear that militants would conduct a suicide bombing at the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

The closure cast a pall over the holiday, traditionally a time of shopping and family outings for Palestinians that is not unlike the Christmas season.

And it served as a bitter reminder that despite the peace agreements, the generations-long conflict between Palestinians and Jews is far from being resolved.

Because of the closure, East Jerusalem, the Palestinians' economic and cultural centre, is out of bounds. East Jerusalem's shopping district, usually packed at this time of the year, was deserted Wednesday.

"Today, life in Jerusalem should be like a festival, like a pilgrimage to Mecca," Mr. Mohammed Zighari said in his empty sweets shop. He said sales had fallen by 50 per cent.

Israeli leaders said Wednesday that they ordered the closure reluctantly as the lesser of two evils.

"We are very aware of the suffering it causes," said Interior Minister Haim Ramon. But he said if an attack had gone off, it would have prompted a much longer closure.

A bombing also would hurt Prime Minister Shimon Peres' bid for re-election in a vote expected for May or early June.

Israeli security forces have been on alert because Wednesday marks the end of the 40-day mourning period for Yahia Ayyash, chief bombmaker of the Muslim militant group Hamas.

Mr. Ayyash orchestrated seven bombings that killed 55 people over two years. His assassination was widely attributed to Israel, and Hamas has vowed to take revenge.

While on the run from the Israelis, Mr. Ayyash became a folk hero to many Palestinians, and a framed photograph of the bombmaker also hung on a wall in the two-room shack of the Abu Shilbaya home, next to the standard poster of Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque.

Mr. Abu Shilbaya, sitting on one of several straw-stuffed mattresses covering the cement floor, avoided talking about politics, saying his main concern was how to make ends meet.

As a skilled plumber, he earned $650 a month in the 1980s working for an Israeli company, when more than 100,000 Palestinians were employed in Israel and moved freely.

When Israel imposed restrictions on Palestinian workers after the 1991 Gulf war, Mr. Abu Shilbaya lost his entry permit. Now he makes $150 a month doing odd jobs in the West Bank.

As a result of the current closure, Mr. Abu Shilbaya can't get to his job in the village of Anata, which is in the West Bank but can only be reached from the Amari refugee camp by passing through Jerusalem.

Hoping to make some money for the holiday, he took a two-day job digging sewage ditches for the U.N. field office in the camp, some 16 kilometres north of Jerusalem.

But he said his pay, $15, won't even be enough to buy ingredients for the traditional holiday sweets, cookies filled with date paste. He opened his refrigerator to illustrate the point. It held six eggs and a dozen cucumbers.

His oldest daughter, 15-year-old Fidda, has already resigned herself to a sad Eid Al Fitr.

"I told my father a long time ago I wanted to go to the zoo in Jerusalem," she said. "But now he's not working, and our situation is very difficult."

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

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PROGRAMME TWO

14:00 ..... The Flintstones
14:30 ..... Disney's Aladdin
15:00 ..... Family Playhouse
15:25 ..... Pugwall's Summer
15:50 ..... Islamic History in Jordan
16:10 ..... Drama — Okavango
17:00 Doc. — Des Plantes Et Des Hommes
17:30 Serie — Les Compagnons De L'Adventure
18:00 Magazine — Envoye Special
19:00 ..... News in French
19:15 Magazine — Sports Et Musique
19:30 ..... News Headlines
19:35 Comedy — Keeping Up Appearances
20:00 ..... Doc. — Oriental Rugs
20:35 ..... Hawai Five-0 (drama)
21:25 Doc. — Women of the World
22:00 ..... News in English
22:25 ..... Counterstrike
23:15 .. The American Chart Show
23:59 ..... Series — Stay Lucky

PRAYER TIMES

04:54 ..... Fajr
06:18 ..... (Sunrise) Duha
11:50 ..... Dhuhr
14:58 ..... 'Asr
17:27 ..... Maghreb
18:45 ..... 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Swaifieh, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church, Tel. 632785.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590.
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Terrasancta Church Tel: 622366
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 623541.
Anglican Church Tel. 652826
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331.
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 652526.
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel: 824328.
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 845457
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932
Church of Nazarene Tel.675691.
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.

Scattered showers are expected with temperatures around average and winds southeasterly moderate.

In Aqaba, moderate weather conditions will prevail with winds northerly active and seas choppy.

Min./Max. temp.

Amman	5 / 15
Aqaba	11 / 21
Deserts	4/ 16
Jordan Valley	10 / 20

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 16, Aqaba 22. Humidity readings: Amman 39 per cent, Aqaba 37 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Ghaleb Zawaideh	736011
Dr. Fakher Bilbeisi	663412
Dr. Khalil Al Tusluq	757253
Dr. Mahmoud Amir	888883
Firas pharmacy	661912
Ferdows pharmacy	778336
Al Asema pharmacy	637055
Nairoukh pharmacy	623672
Al Salam pharmacy	636730
Yacoub pharmacy	644945
Shmeisani pharmacy	637660
Nairoujh pharmacy	623672
Najib pharmacy	847632

IRBID:

Dr. Ahmad Qasu	281741
Alquds pharmacy	(—)

ZARQA:

Dr. Mahmoud Abu Mahfouz	986414
Khalifeh pharmacy	985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre	637111
Civil Defence Department	661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue	630341
Civil Defence Emergency	199
Rescue Police	192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade	617101
Blood Bank	775121
Highway Police	843402
Traffic Police	896390
Public Security Department	630321
Hotel Complaints	605800
Price Complaints	661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints	897467
Amman Municipality Complaints	787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)	121
Overseas Calls	010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs	623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs	661101
Jordan Television	773111
Radio Jordan	774111
Water Authority	680100
Jordan Electricity Authority	815615
Electric Power Company	636381
RJ Flight Information	08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport	08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

Hussein Medical Centre	813813/32
Khalidi Maternity, J. Amn	644281/6
Akileh Maternity, J. Amn.	642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity	642362
Malhas, J. Amman	636140
Palestine, Shmeisani	607071
Shmeisani Hospital	669131
University Hospital	845845
Al-Muasher Hospital	667227/9
The Islamic, Abdali	666127/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali	664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen	777101/3
Al-Bashir, J. Ashrafieh	775111/26
Army, Marka	891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital	602240/50
'Amal Hospital	607155

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital	(09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital	(09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital	(09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital	(09)990990
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery	865199

IRBID:

Princess Basma Hospital	(02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital	(02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital	(02)247100

AQABA:

Princess Haya Hospital	(03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (08)53200-5, where it should always be verified.

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

05:30 ..... Bangkok (RJ)
08:00 ..... Aqaba (RJ)
08:35 ..... Jeddah (RJ)
08:55 ..... Larnaca (RJ)
09:20 ..... Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:55 ..... Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:05 ..... Beirut (RJ)
10:15 ..... Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
16:30 ..... Jeddah (RJ)
16:45 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
17:00 ..... Brussels, Paris (RJ)
17:45 ..... London (RJ)
18:00 ..... Madrid, Geneva (RJ)
18:25 ..... Athens (RJ)
18:45 ..... Frankfurt (RJ)
19:35 ..... Rome (RJ)
19:40 ..... Vienna (RJ)
22:45 ..... Aqaba (RJ)
00:10 ..... Cairo (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

10:30 ..... Sanaa (IY)
12:40 ..... Shariqah, Bahrain (GF)
14:00 ..... Doha (O7)
14:30 ..... Moscow (SU)
20:10 ..... Beirut (ME)
20:20 ..... Cairo (MS)
23:10 ..... Istanbul (TK)
23:59 ..... London, Beirut (BA)
01:25 ..... Amsterdam (KL)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights (Marka Airport)

21:25 ..... Aqaba (RW)
22:25 ..... Aqaba (RW)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

05:30 ..... Aqaba (RJ)
06:15 ..... Beirut (RJ)
08:50 ..... Frankfurt (RJ)
10:05 ... Aqaba, Vienna (add) (RJ)
11:00 ..... Vienna (RJ)
11:15 ..... Rome (RJ)
11:25 ..... Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
11:30 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
11:30 ..... Jeddah (add) (RJ)
12:15 ..... Athens (RJ)
20:10 ..... Cairo (RJ)
20:15 ..... Aqaba (RJ)
20:20 ..... Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
20:25 ..... New Delhi (RJ)
20:35 ..... Jeddah (RJ)
20:15 20:15 ..... Aqaba (RJ)
20:45 ..... Damascus (RJ)
22:05 ..... Singapore, Jakarta (RJ)
22:40 ..... Bangkok (RJ)
22:45 ..... Sanaa (RJ)

Other flights (Terminal 2)

07:45 ..... Beirut (ME)
11:30 ..... Sanaa (IY)
13:30 ..... Doha (GF)
15:00 ..... Doha (O7)
16:05 ..... Moscow (SU)
21:10 ..... Cairo (MS)
02:25 ..... Amsterdam (KL)

Royal Wings (RW) Flights (Marka Airport)

07:00 ..... Aqaba (RW)
08:00 ..... Aqaba (RW)

HIJAZ RAILWAY TRAIN

Dep. Amman ... 8:00 a.m. every Monday
Arr. Damascus 5:00 p.m. every Monday
Dep. Damascus 7:30 a.m. every Sunday
Arr. Amman .... 5:00 p.m. every Sunday

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in fils per kg.

Apple	700/ 500
Banana	600/600
Banana (Mukammar)	520/520
Banana (imported)	800/650
Cabbage	60/ 40
Carrot	170/100
Cauliflower	180/100
Cucumbers (large)	150/ 100
Cucumbers (small)	280 / 180
Eggplant	200/ 150
Garlic	1000/800
Grape Fruit	220/120
Lemon	400/250
Marrow (large)	120/ 80
Marrow (small)	230 / 120
Onion (green)	140/100
Onion (dry)	210/ 150
Orange	480/380
Pepper (hot)	500 / 400
Pepper (sweet)	540/400
Potato	220/160
Radish	160/100
String Beans	700 / 500
Spanich	160 / 100
Tomato	150/80

King visits new RJ facility at 7th Circle

Advance check-in services to speed up pre-flight procedures

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Hussein Saturday inspected a new passenger services facility at Jabal Amman's Seventh Circle and was briefed on services aimed at facilitating travel procedures on Royal Jordanian (RJ) planes.

The services would make it possible for RJ passengers to select their seats, pick up their boarding passes, make airport tax payments and check-in their baggage at their convenience at the new facility in advance rather than at the airport, explained RJ President Nader Dahabi. Mr. Dahabi said advance check-in passengers could then board an RJ bus heading for Queen Alia International Airport.

The new facility,which is still being refurbished, is 1,800 square metres and consists of two storeys, according to Mr. Dahabi.

He said that the first floor consists of a passengers hall and an RJ ticket and freight services offices. The second floor is assigned for RJ offices, a duty free shop, a cafeteria, a bank, a car rental office and a mosque, he said.

The new facility is scheduled to be opened in 45 days, Mr. Dahabi said.

Prime Minister Abdul Karim Kabariti, Mr. Dahabi, Captain Bader Steitieh, the King's private pilot, and senior RJ officers received the King at the new facility.

His Majesty King Hussein Saturday visits new Royal Jordanian passenger facility (Petra photo)

Pilgrims kneel before the Sacred Mosque at Mecca (file photo)

'Hanafi doctrine allows cash donations to Al Fitr zakat'

By Lola Keilani
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN— Jordan's Deputy Mufti, Sa'eed *Hijawi*, Saturday said that according to the Hanafi doctrine of Islam, which is followed in Jordan, Al Fitr zakat (alms for the poor) during the holy month of Ramadan can be made in the form of cash.

A statement issued on Friday by Saudi Arabia's highest religious authority, Sheikh Bin Baz, said that the zakat traditionally made at Eid Al Fitr should be made only in the form of food, such as dates or wheat.

Sheikh Hijawi explained, however, that Saudi Arabia's doctrine is Hanbali, while "we (in Jordan) follow a different doctrine," he said.

In addition, Sheikh Hijawi stressed that the idea behind zakat at the Eid is to allow underprivileged families to celebrate the feast with sufficient food and new clothes for the children, according to the teachings of Prophet Mohammad.

According to the Jordanian Ifta' Council, which interprets sharia the bread winner in a family is responsible for the distribution of money to the poor before the Eid. The minimum that should be given is 50 piasters per family member.

"We take the essence of the Hadith not the literal translation", said Sheikh Hijawi.

He added that Prophet Mohammed implied that on the Eid all Muslims should be celebrating, not worrying about their basic daily needs.

There are seven major doctrines — Islamic schools of thought — followed by Muslims throughout the Islamic world. The majority of these doctrines allow a Muslim to give cash as the zakat at Eid Al Fetr.

Most Islamic states adopt their own doctrine, and Muslims living in any country have the right to choose any doctrine they feel comfortable with.

Doctrines differ in minor respects when they interpret certain of the Prophet's teachings.

"In Jordan although we follow the Hanafi doctrine, we do adopt the translations of the different schools of thought," said Abdullah Keilani, who teaches at the Sharia Faculty at the University of Jordan.

According to Dr. Keilani, Jordan adopts what it views as the strongest argument, taking into consideration the welfare of the society.

Throughout the year Muslims are also obliged to pay 2.5 per cent for every JD 100 of savings if their savings after one year reach JD 400.

Jordanian delegates report 'concrete' progress in displaced persons talks

AMMAN (Petra)—Concrete progress was achieved at a two-day meeting on the fate of displaced Palestinians of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, according to Abdul Karim Abul Haija , Jordan's official spokesperson and member of the Kingdom's delegation to the meeting.

Mr. Abul Haija described the outcome of the meetings, held in Cairo between delegates from Israel, the Palestine National Authority (PNA), Egypt and Jordan as positive and contrasting with previous meetings on this subject.

Speaking Saturday following his return from Cairo, Mr. Abul Haija said the delegates discussed a set of criteria and proposals on the methodology to be adopted by the four parties in order to obtain statistical information about the displaced persons.

He said the four sides decided to consider information provided by all the parties as well as the records of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

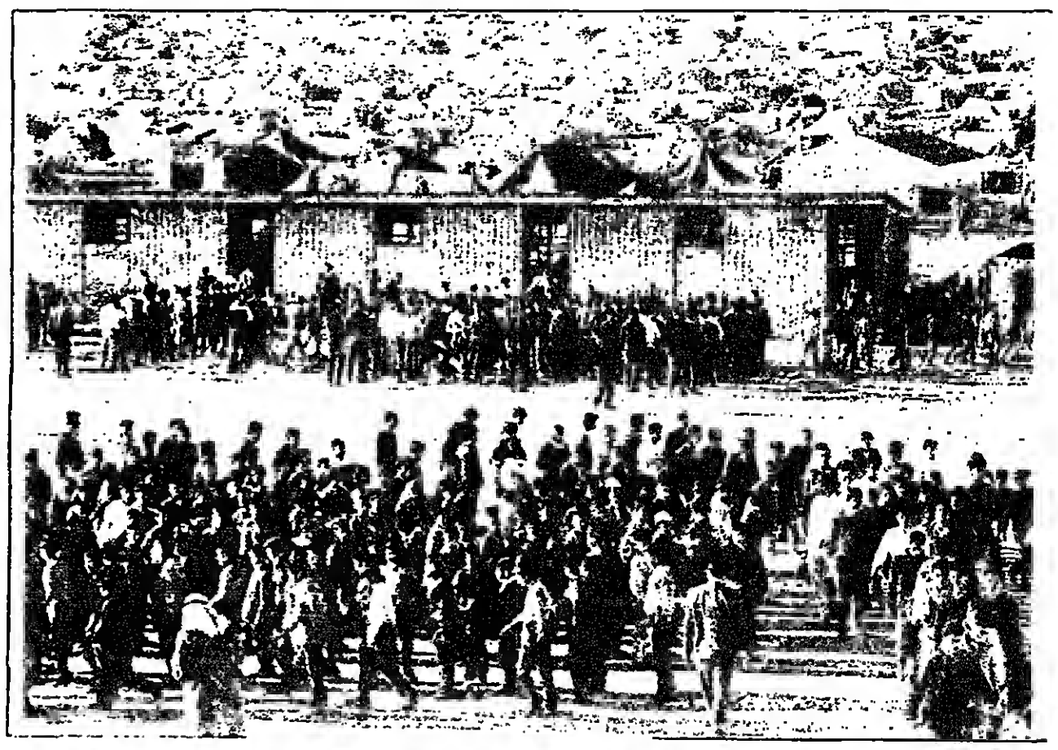
Any information on the numbers of displaced persons to be submitted to the four-party committee will be subject to scrutiny and revision before being endorsed, said Mr. Abul Haija.

He added that the committee agreed that the displaced Palestinians will be given the right to return to their homeland.

But he noted that the agreement on the number of the displaced persons will require further discussions and additional meetings.

The Cairo session was the sixth in a series of meetings held earlier at other venues, and according to Mr. Abul Haija, the committee will convene another meeting from March 12 to 23 in the West Bank Town of Bethlehem

According to Mr. Abul Haija, the Jordanian government will continue its efforts to reaffirm the right of the displaced Palestinians to repatriation, but will not force any one to change his/her place of residence. He said the repatriation process will be organised according to a programme agreed to by the four parties.



Prefab classrooms built in 1969 to house UNRWA schools for displaced persons in the Baqaa camp in Jordan (file photo)

WHAT'S GOING ON

CONCERTS

* Musical performance of oriental heritage at the Phoenix Gallery, Gardens Street on Thurs., at 8:30 p.m.

PLAY

"Ramadan Supermarket," (in Arabic) at the Royal Cultural Centre at 8:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Abstract (plastic) art by Mirvat Emile Wahhab at the Housing Bank Complex Gallery (until March 5).

*Paintings by Jordanian and other Arab artists at Alia Art Gallery (until March 5).

* Engravings by French artists at the French Cultural Centre (until Feb. 29).

* Printmaking and paintings by Yasser Dweik at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh. Also displaying paintings and sculptures by contemporary artists (until Feb. 18).

Late deputy eulogised

Lower house formally informs government of vacany in chamber

AMMAN (Petra) — The Lower House of Parliament Saturday formally informed the government of the vacancy in the House as a result of the death of Deputy Ibrahim Shihdeh Ziyadeh of the Balqa district on Jan 7, 1996.

House Speaker Saad Hayel Srour said in a statement Saturday that notification to the government was stipulated under the Constitution, and parliament chose to notify the government when 40 days have elapsed since Mr. Ziyadeh's death .

On Friday, a eulogy for the late deputy was attended by many deputies and relatives of the deceased, according to Mr . Srour.

Having received the official memorandum from Parliament the government is now expected to set a date for by- elections in the Balqa district to elect a deputy to fill the vacant seat , said Mr. Srour.

Under the provisions of the Constitution, when a seat in the House becomes vacant because of death, resignation or other reasons, a by -election will be held within two months of formal notification to the government .

Also under the Consitution the elected deputy in a by-election will fill the seat until the end of the House's current mandate.

A total of 65,277 citizens in the Balqa district are eligible to vote, said Balqa Governor Theeb Suleiman in a statement last month, and the voting will take pace at 76 voting centres in the Balqa governorate , according to, Mr. Suleiman..

Deputy Ziyadeh died of cancer at the age of 44.

UNESCO to open new regional office in Amman

AMMAN (Petra)—Jordan and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) signed an agreement in Paris on establishing a new UNESCO office in Amman to follow up and organise the organisation's activities in the Arab region in the fields of culture and communication.

The agreement was signed by the Kingdom's ambassador to France and representative at UNESCO Sharif Fawaz Sharaf and UNESCO Director General Federico Mayor.

In a statement at the signing ceremony, Mr. Mayor paid tribute to Jordan's endeavours in education and culture and requested that Sharif Sharaf convey his greetings and UNESCO's appreciation to Their Majesties King Hussein and Queen Noor and HRH Crown Prince Hassan for their role in supporting the organisation's activities in the Arab region.

Jordan assumes a unique central position in the region and has become an essential element for peace-building thus benefiting the region's population, said Mr. Mayor

Through this new office, he said, UNESCO will exert all its efforts to enhance cooperation with Jordan and the Arab states in education, culture, science, and communication, thereby giving further momentum to the peace process.

Sharif Fawaz Sharaf

For his part Sharif Sharaf pledged continued Jordanian support to UNESCO to help achieve its goals.

UNESCO already has a regional office for education in the Arab states known as UNEDBAS, established in 1991.

Sharif Sharaf said King Hussein attaches great importance to the establishment of UNESCO offices in Jordan that would promote cultural and scientific activities and help enhance socio-economic development in the Middle East.

The opening of the office in Amman, he added, is a manifestation of the organisation's intent to cooperate with Jordan.

UNESCO Deputy Director Adnan Badran said the new office was expected to start operations following Eid Al Fitr.

In addition, he said, the new office will provide educational services to Jordan through an international expert in education who will reside in Amman.

Bangladesh orders some repolling after BNP win

DHAKA (R) — The ruling Bangladesb Nationalist Party's (BNP) crushing general election win against an almost empty field was marred Saturday by repolling and cbecks on alleged irregularities in more than one third of constituencies.

The electoral commission said its latest results showed tbe BNP, led hy Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, had won 167 out of 300 parliament seats at stake. Only one seat, won hy an independent candidate, has so far eluded the BNP's grasp.

The commission said it had ordered partial repolling in another 84 constituencies after violence during Thursday's election marred voting, and had suspended results in 35 others while alleged irregularities, such as ballot-box stuffing, were investigated.

It gave no details and did not say how many voters turned out to vote in the election, which was boycotted by all main opposition parties.

Election results had not been updated since Friday night because officials and ballot counters had retired for night-long prayers, a special ritual for Muslims during the fasting month of Ramadan, commission sources said.

Commission officials were supposed to work on Saturday, although it was a public holiday, but they did not turn np.

The BNP won an expected easy victory when it bagged more than 150 seats in partial results Friday. Mrs. Khaleda's opponents have dismissed the elections as meaningless.

Information Minister Shamsul Islam said on Friday night the election, despite a low turnout, had saved the country from extra-constitutional rule.

As Bangladesh emerged from a three-day shutdown called to protest the vote, Khaleda's arch-rival Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League announced Friday her party would launch a non-cooperation movement for three days from February 24.

The South Asian nation has frequently been paralysed by strikes and shutdowns since 1994, as the opposition unsuccesssfully tried to force Mrs. Khaleda to resign. The political disruption bas cost Bangladesh's fragile economy dearly.

"The schools and government offices will be shut, banks will be closed, no work will be done at the ports of Chittagong and Mongla, the courts will be closed, road, rail and air transport will be shut down — nothing will work," Hasina told a rally Friday evening.

The action is scheduled to begin after week-long holidays at the end of the holy month of Ramadan to secure maximum popnlar participation, Awami League leaders said.

Thursday's vote was accompanied hy widespread violence, whicb frightened off many potential voters.

At least 16 people were killed and 500 wounded in violence during the poll, despite a show of force hy soldiers and security personnel. Voting officials were attacked, ballot papers stolen, and voting centres set ablaze.

In the northern district of Rangpur nearly 50 poll officials who fled from duties amid violence had yet to return, a local official said.

Sources in the southern district of Feni said several candidates had been in hiding since Thursday after election opponents threatened to assault them.

Hasina and other opposition leaders said the voting was heavily rigged to ensure BNP's victory in what they called a "voterless" election.

Opposition parties boycotted the poll because Mrs. Khaleda refused to step aside for a neutral caretaker administration to supervise the vote.

Khaleda has said she will form the next government even if only 10 percent of voters cast ballots.

Rescuers recover all 20 bodies from Japan tunnel

TOKYO (R) — Rescuers Saturday recovered all the 20 bodies of victims crushed by a rock fall in a Japanese road tunnel a week ago, ending an agonising wait at the site for relatives of the victims.

A police spokesman said the body of a lone motorist was found first in his car and then 19 bodies were found in a bus.

"We have found everyone and they are all dead," the spokesman said.

Both vehicles were travelling through the tunnel when it was crushed hy a 50,000-tonne slab of rock which fell on the tunnel roof at abont 8 a.m. on February 10.

The spokesman said the last bodies recovered were two passengers sitting in the centre of the crushed bus.

The 1,086-metre (3,563-ft) Toyohama Tunnel is located about 50 km (30 miles) northwest of Sapporo, the regional capital of Hokkaido Island in northern Japan.

For more than one week rescuers working in freezing temperatures used dynamite explosions, heavy earthmoving equipment and their bare bands in an unsuccesful race against time to rescue the victims from their icy tomb.

The first body recovered was the lone motorist Tatsushi Umemoto, a 20-year-old employee of a fishing tackle store in the near-hy town of Shakotan, police said.

He was found at the wbeel of his red four-wheel-drive vehicle, located under rubble abont 40 metres inside the entrance to the tunnel.

The bus and the car were buried in a 40 metre stretcb of tunnel when the ceiling gave way under the weight of rocks and mud.

To get to the hus victims, rescuers cut open the roof of the vehicle wbicb was trapped under five large rocks and part of the collapsed 85 centimetre thick concrete ceiling.

The 3.2-metre high hus was crushed to about one metre in height.

"It was very difficult to remove reinforced concrete over the bus roof. That was the main reason wby we took so much time to reacb the victims," the police spokesman said.

Rescuers used scanning devices to pick up sounds throughout the week-long operation but never once heard any signs of life.

Geology experts say landslides are a constant hazard on Hokkaido, an island regularly sbaken by earthquakes and blanketed by snow for up to six months of the year.

Relatives waited at the site throughout the rescue attempt and four times gave permission to use dynamite explosions to blast the giant rock slab off the tunnel roof.

Rescue workers from Japan's Ground Self-Defence Force remove rubble covering a crushed bus (seen at centre bottom) in which 19 people were trapped since February 10 (Reuters photo)

Barbie doll steps into hightec

EL SEGUNDO, California (AFP) - Leading U.S toymaker Mattel has created a CD-ROM version of its Barbie doll, targeting the largely untapped market of computer software for girls. The toymaker recently unveiled a new company, Mattel Media Inc., pointing out that 80 percent of the current CD-ROM market caters to boys and men. One of its new products is a program called "Barbie fashion designer" by which Barbie lovers can develop their own fashion patterns that can be printed and made into real clothes for their dolls, Mattel said in a statement. Conceived with the help of digital domain, a special effects company used in the film "Apollo 13," the programme will retail for abont $35 when it is released world-wide this fall. Besides Barbie, Mattel Media Inc. will also release software versions of other staple Mattel toy brands such as Fisher-Price, polly pocket and cabbage patch kids. Doug Glen, the president of the new company, said he expected the multimedia unit to increase significantly Mattel's business, which in 1995 had sales totaling $ 3.6 billion

Chinese river dolphin closer to extinction

BEIJING (R) — China's endangered Yangtze River dolphin has drawn closer to extinction with the death last month of a large female, apparently electrocuted by fisbermen, the China daily newspaper said Tuesday. Fewer than 100 river dolphins survive in the mighty Yangtze and could be extinct within 25 years unless action was taken now, the newspaper said. The dolphin was found dying in the lower reaches of the river, the newspaper said. The mammal, whicb later died, weighed 160 kg (352 lb) and measured 2.45 metres (eight ft) — the largest ever found. It appeared to have suffered an electric shock, probably caused accidentally by local fishermen, the newspaper quoted Professor Zhou Kaiya, of the Nanjing Normal University In Southern Jiangsu province, as saying. The fisheries bureau is to bold a seminar next week to discuss strenghtening policies to protect the river dolphin, the newspaper said. Since 1986, when the dolphins nnmbered 300, one natural and two semi-natural reserves have been set up along the Yangtze bnt the efforts have failed to stop the sharp drop in their population. Meanwhile, zoologists bope that another female white-fin dolphin caught in December after a four-year search will mate with an elderly male in the Tian-E-Zhou National Baiji Reserve. But the reserve bas limited resources and needs 20 pairs to save the species from extinction, the newspaper said. The dolphin's main enemies are water pollution, nets and other fishing tackle and the flourishing shipping business along the Yangtze.

A fish a day could keep asthma at bay—researchers

SYDNEY (R) — A fish a day could keep asthma at bay, according to Australian researchers investigating one of the country's most common respiratory diseases. Fish oil, already championed as a natural antidote for diseases like diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis, has now been identified as a possible way to prevent asthma, one of the researchers told Reuters. "At risk children — children who are allergic and bave allergic parents — have less risk of getting asthma if they eat oily fish," said Professor Ann Woolcock, commenting on researcb published in the latest edition of the medical journal of Australia.

Australian labour struggles to dent opposition lead

CANBERRA (R) — Australia's 13-year-old labour government, well behind in opinion polls three weeks into a five-week election campaign, is struggling to gain ground against an opposition carrying a powerful message of change.

Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating and his ministers tried but failed last year to dent the liberal-national opposition's commanding lead, and intense campaigning since the election was called has shown no more success.

The government seemed to be sliding uncontrollably towards a crasb in the Marcb 2 election, if the polls were to be believed, as its call for voters to stick with the devil they know appeared to be falling on deaf ears.

All the signs were that the conservative slogan "enough is enough" was the only message getting through.

"There comes a point when the voters are tired of you and there's just not much you can do about it," said one federal labor official in Queensland.

"He (Keating) keeps repeating the message, but no-one seems to be listening," the official told Reuters.

That message was that John Howard, wbo for 20 years has been a major figure in Australian politics and is now the grand old man of the conservatives, was only pretending to have become a moderate.

"He's pretending be's not himself," Mr. Keating has said on the campaign trail every day now for the past three weeks.

Mr. Howard once planned to abolisb the extremely popular national bealth insurance scheme but now promises to keep it. He once advocated radical wage reforms but now says that under his government no-one would lose pay or conditions.

Mr. Howard and his fellow conservatives are conscious of their last election defeat, when they promised radical tax and labour reforms only to be rejected by voters who believed Mr. Keating's claim that the reforms would be too painful.

Even Mr. Keating's oft-repeated appeal for a republic by 2001 and an Australian bead of state to replace the Britain's Queen Elizabeth has failed to excite voters.

They regularly put the republic at the bottom of their lists of key issues in opinion polls, while interest rates, unemployment and economic growth have always been at or near the top.

Another issue dogging Mr. Keating was next year's bndget.

Private economists say the budget is heading for deep deficit. The opposition demands that Mr. Keating open the books, Mr. Keating refuses and the opposition and media want to know wby.

Pork-barrelling on both sides — better health care for all, for example — bas cancelled itself out and, by raising more complex fiscal issues, has only muffled the government's campaigning to recover ground.

And there is a lot of ground to recover.

Since Mr. Howard took over as opposition leader a year ago, opinion polls have shown him at least six percentage points ahead.

He was eight points abead when Mr. Keating called the election on Jannary 27 and, according to an average of the three main polls, was still at least that far ahead last weekend.

An election matching the results from any of them would be a conservative landslide ending the labor era.

U.N. chief plans standby force for Burundi

UNITED NATIONS (R) — Fearing Burundi will descend into genocidal massacres, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said the United Nations should begin planning for an international intervention force.

The operation, be said, should be authorised by the security council and allowed to use force but be organised by a group of member states. The troops should remain in their home countries but be ready for deployment at short notice.

In a report to the council, obtained by Reuters Friday, Mr. Boutros-Ghali said the intervention force might have to be expanded to 25,000 soldiers if it met with resistance.

The United States, which had objected to earlier proposals of a standby force stationed in nearby Zaire, said Wasbington was considering the new proposal favourably and would belp with logistics but not send troops. Both France and Britain have also indicated they would not dispatch soldiers to Burundi.

But it is expected that none of these states will criticise the new proposals and present a united front towards the Burundi government.

Mr. Boutros-Gbali argued that planning for a force was necessary to put pressure on extremists. He told members to "act in a coherent and concerted way," so "extremists on both sides will not be under any illusions they can exploit perceived differences."

"There is abundant evidence that the people of Burundi, particularly their leaders, pay attention to the words of the security council," he said.

"Pressure must be maintained on the political leaders because it is widely believed in (Burundi) that consideration of strong steps by the council is necessary," he added.

Burundi bas the same ethnic mix as neighbouring Rwanda, where up to one million Tutsis and Hutu moderates were slaughtered by Hutu troops, militiamen and mobs in mid-1994.

More than 100,000 people have been killed in violence in Burundi since the 1993 assassination by soldiers of the country's first freely-elected head of state. The conflict has pitted the Tutsi-dominated army against Hutu rebels with civilians caught in between.

"Less than two years after the genocide in Rwanda, the international community must not be caught unprepared," Mr. Boutros-Ghali said in his report.

"I believe that it would be useful, at this stage, to consider the possibility of establishing a standby multinational force for humanitarian intervention," he said.

The mandate of the troops, he said, would be to deter massacres, to provide security to refugees, displaced persons and civilians at risk and to protect key economic installations."

Quake kills seven in Indonesia, causes tidal waves

JAKARTA (R) — Seven people were killed and 18 injured wben an earthquake hit a remote part of Indonesia Saturday causing tidal waves and demolishing hundreds of homes.

Residents in Biak town in remote Irian Jaya planned to spend Saturday night out of doors, saying they feared further tremors.

The official Antara News Agency reported that the quake destroyed bouses in coastal areas of Biak island and parts of the main new Guinea island and spawned damaging tidal waves.

"Hundreds of houses were destroyed hy the quake and tidal waves have caused many families to lose their houses and belongings," it said.

But it was not immediately clear where or how many of the deaths and injuries occurred. One official reported casualties in biak town rather than coastal areas.

"We have reports that seven people had been killed and 18 others injured. Many buildings, including houses, cburches and mosques were damaged," a police officer told Reuters, speaking from Biak, 3,400 km east of Jakarta.

The quake measured 7.5 on the Richter scale, meteorology officials said.

Its epicentre was in the Pacific Ocean, 106 km east of Biak island and it struck at 12:59 p.m. (0559 GMT),

It caused two-metre waves and damaged the tower of the main airport of Biak town.

"Many people still feel scared and are gathering outside their bomes. They have erected tents outside and will spend the night there," a police officer told Reuters.

It was unclear if any foreigners were among the victims. Biak island is known for palm-fringed, pristine beaches with beautiful coral reefs.

An official at the Jakarta-based meteorology office said three major aftershocks had jolted the area.

"We are still scared of the aftershocks and it is safer to stay outside homes," one resident said.

Biak is one of the islands in the Irian Jaya Province on the western balf of New Guinea island, where separatist rebels are holding 13 hostages, including six Europeans.

Biak, with a population of more than 82,000 people, has an international airport where flights by state-owned carrier Garuda Indonesia stop before continuing to Los Angeles.

A telecommunications official in Biak said the city residents felt strong tremors when the quake struck.

"Our office is okay except for the fences which are crumbling," he said. "Some of the cars kept in the garage were damaged because the garage crumbled," he said.

Other residents said they were alarmed by the quake and ran from their houses to escape. "We are all shocked by the quake and we are still cautions at this moment," one resident said.

The Irian Jaya qnake was the strongest to hit the Indonesian archipelago this year. Indonesia — part of the "Pacific rim of fire" — is frequently hit by earthquakes, some powerful.

Japan's meteorological agency and Australian seismologists also recorded the quake.

Last month, tidal waves spawned by a hig earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale killed eight people and damaged more than 400 houses in central Sulawesi.

More than 2,000 people were killed in December 1992 when a quake measuring 6.8 on the Richter scale struck the island of Flores near the resort island of Bali.

Indonesia's most famous volcanic eruption was in 1883 when Krakatau, between Java and Sumatra, exploded, triggering a huge wave that killed more than 36,000 people.

Strike against summary killings disrupts Karachi

KARACHI (R) — A strike called by the ethnic Mohajir National Movement (MQM) in protest at alleged extra-judicial killings of its supporters disrupted normal activity in the Pakistan city of Karachi Saturday.

Witnesses said main shopping and business centers remained shut and traffic was thin in most parts of the city.

A senior police officer said no violence had been reported, though ambulance workers said one man had been shot and wounded in the eastern Quaidabad area overnight.

Streets were virtually deserted in district central and parts of districts east and west, considered as MQM strongholds.

Normally, government offices and institutions such as the Karachi stock exchange that have a two-day weekend are closed Saturdays, but private businesses and schools are open.

The MQM called the strike in protest at the killings of four leading party workers on thursday by police. Police said the four men died in a gunbattle. The MQM contends that they were shot in cold blood after being detained.

Saturday's one-day strike was the third staged by the MQM this year. MQM strikes paralysed Karachi, Pakistan's biggest city and economic hub, on 26 days last year.

The MQM says more than 60 of its activists have been the victims of extra-judicial killings by the security forces this year, while 130 were killed in similar circumstances in 1995.

Shoaib Bukhari, an MQM leader, said police had summarily killed 12 MQM activists in the last two days alone.

"The police shot dead eight workers Friday in Orangi town at close range and killed four others Thursdny after picking them up from a flat in a fake encounter," he told Reuters.

Police say all the deaths occurred during battles with armed MQM militants, many of whom were wanted for violent crimes.

Prime Minister Benazir Bbutto's government has denied that the security forces have any shont-to-kill policy in their long-running struggle with the MQM.

The MQM demands greater political and economic rights for Karachi's mohajir majority, made up of Urdu-speaking Muslims who migrated from India at partition in 1947 and their descendants.

Karachi is the venue for three matches in the world cup cricket tournament, the first of which will be on February 29.

The MQM has said it has no plans to disrupt the world cup, but may call for further protests against the security forces.

An injured person is taken from the scene of a crash between an Amtrak train and a suburban Maryland commuter train (Reuter photo)

At least 12 dead in Washington area train crash

SILVER SPRING, Maryland (R) - An Amtrak train smashed head-on into a stopped suburban Washington commuter train at the height of rush hour Friday, killing 12 people and injuring 23 in a crush of flames and twisted metal.

All of those killed were on board the commuter train, a local fire official said. The Maryland Rail Commuter (MARC) train had stopped at a signal at 5:30 p.m. EST (2230 GMT) when it was rammed by the Amtrak train, a state transit spokesman said.

Moments before the impact, conductors ran through the cars of the MARC train, shouting to passengers that a crash was imminent and they should get on the floor, the Washington Post reported in Saturday's editions.

"Three conductors came out screaming 'everybody get down'," Kelvin Williams, 19, told the paper. "And then we crashed. Everybody was crying and screaming."

Mike Hall, a spokesman for Montgomery County, said the victims appeared to have died from burns and injuries from the impact. They were still in the wreckage Friday night.

"There may be more, but for sure there are 12 dead," said Denise Fox of the Montgomery County Department Of Fire And Rescue Service.

Helicopters buzzed above the wreckage directing powerful searchlights into the derailed cars as fire crew searched for the injured and dead.

"Basically, we think we've removed everyone who can walk. We've still got cars to go through so who knows what we're going to find," a local fire official said.

Witnesses said a huge fireball erupted from the trains after the crash, which occurred in a snowstorm. "I heard a big bang. I was standing at the window and I saw flames in the air. It was like thunder," said 14-year-old Tiffany Davis, who saw the crash from a nearby eighth-floor apartment.

Officials at four area hospitals said they had treated 23 injured passengers.

Karen Kelleher, a spokeswoman for suburban hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, said one victim there was in critical condition from smoke inhalation. Two others were in fair condition with a concussion and fractured ribs, she said.

Twenty others had been treated at area hospitals and many already had been released by late Friday. The remainder were in good to fair condition, according to hospital officials.

The Amtrak train rammed into a passenger car at the front of the three-car MARC train the marc locomotive was in the back, train officials said.

Four Amtrak cars in front — two locomotives and two baggage cars — derailed, causing minor injuries to 10 passengers farther in back, Amtrak said. The smashed wreckage of a MARC car stretched underneath one of the Amtrak train cars.

Officials said they were still uncertain of the cause of the crash. The 15-car Amtrak train, the capital limited, running far behind schedule, was carrying 175 passengers from Washington to Chicago, officials said.

Spokesmen for the Mass Transit Administration of Maryland said the MARC train was waiting on a side track for the Amtrak train, which was supposed to pass on the main track, they said.

Warren Monks, a spokesman for the Mass Transit Administration of Maryland, said investigators would likely focus initially on the switch that linked the main track with the adjacent track.

That switch, which was operated from a rail transportation giant CSX's central dispatch in Jacksonville, Florida, gave oo signs it was working improperly, said Marty Fiorentino, a CSX spokesman there.

Deputy Secretary of Transportation Mortimer Downey, who visited the scene, said there was no immediate explanation for the crash.

He said investigators would be looking at the condition of track, equipment, and signal system, orders by the dispatch station, and other factors such as the sobriety of crew.

John Goglia, leader of a team of National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigators at the scene, said late Friday night that investigators had recovered several recorders with data valuable to understanding the crash. Typically, NTSB investigations can take up to six months to complete.

Yeltsin steps up war of words with media

MOSCOW (R) — President Boris Yeltsin hit back at Russia's media Saturday after newspapers attacked him for sacking a television executive and accused him of behaving like an all-powerful tsar.

Yeltsin fired Oleg Poptsov as head of the second channel of Russia's state television and radio (RTR) on Thursday, the day he announced in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg that he would run in the presidential election on June 16.

The sacking prompted charges that Mr. Yeltsin wanted to muzzle the media before the election, but the president's press service dismissed the accusations in a statement.

"The reaction of some of the Moscow mass media to the president's decree relieving Oleg Poptsov of his duties as chairman of RTR is hardly adequate," the statement said.

"The president has many times expressed unequivocal support for the principles of the freedom of the press and considers them essential for a democratic society, for a free Russia. His personnel decisions in no way mean he has changed his position."

The statement, which accused Mr. Poptsov of being one-sided, was unlikely to appease the outraged media.

Several newspapers blasted Mr. Yeltsin Saturday over the sacking and pledges he made in Yekaterinburg and nearby Chelyabinsk to find money to ensure wages and pensions are now paid on time. Some workers have not been paid for months.

"Boris is acting like a tsar," Moskovsky Komsomolets, a regular critic of Mr. Yeltsin, said.

"Giving out money and public executions — this ritual has lasted thousands of years. Egyptian Pharoahs, Roman emperors, Chinese Mandarins, Russian tsars, general secretaries of the Soviet Communist Party. They all did it."

By executions, Moskovsky Komsomolets was referring to Mr. Poptsov's sacking.

"Poptsov's dismissal is an epoch-making event. It gives grounds for far-reaching conclusions," said Komsomolskaya Pravda, another a frequent critic of the president.

Making clear it believed Kremlin aides were behind the sacking, it added: "This event shows quite clearly the determination of the "collective president' to shake not his finger but his fist at the press."

Komsomolskaya Pravda and other newspapers regarded Mr. Poptsov's sacking as the latest sign that Yeltsin was surrounding himself with conservatives at the expense of liberals. Last month he ousted his liberal foreign minister and reformist economic supremo.

Mr. Poptsov was criticised for his coverage of the Chechenya conflict. Mr. Yeltsin also accused him of telling lies and not showing achievements made in industry in a good light.

The media attacks were another blow to Yeltsin, 65, who had two heart attacks last year, trails in popularity polls, faces dogged resistance from separatist guerrillas in Chechenya and is challenged by a resurgent Communist Party.

But in contrast to the shambling figure he has cut in the past year, Mr.Yeltsin looked and sounded sharp in chelyabinsk and won praise for his performance in some newspapers.

"In Yekaterinburg and Chelyabinsk, as never before in recent times, he looked like the man of 1991, the time of the first presidential election," Nezavisimaya Gazeta said.

Mr. Yeltsin hopes also to receive a boost from German Chancellor Helmut Kohl who arrives in Moscow Sunday on a visit expected to support economic and political reformers in Russia.

Yeltsin opens election battle in combative mood

MOSCOW (R) — Russian President Boris Yeltsin, burdened by health problems, low popularity and the bloody conflict in rebel Chechenya, opened his campaign for reelection in a combative mood.

Although he is likely to face a score of rivals in the poll on June 16, he made clear that he would focus his attack on communist leader Gennady Zyuganov, who tops the latest opinion polls.

Mr. Yeltsin, speaking in the Urals city of Chelyabinsk, said he took the decision to stand only reluctantly but he believed that he alone could prevent a return of communism and a reversal of five years of free market reforms.

"I thought a lot about it. But with the current make-up of parliament, with some dangerous presidential candidates who are ready to bury reforms, I had to make this decision," he told steelworkers in the southern industrial city on Friday.

"I would never have run for a second time if I were not worried for the future of reforms."

Mr. Zyuganov, speaking on independent NTV television, said: "The real struggle is between the party of power and the responsible opposition."

He said he feared that the election might not be fully free and fair since he said Mr. Yeltsin had the advantage of what he called control over the media.

Mr. Yeltsin fired Oleg Poptsov, head of the second state television channel RTR, on Thursday for broadcasting what he called lies, showing too many dead bodies and failing to report what he said was the good news in industry.

Several Russian media chiefs retaliated by accusing Mr. Yeltsin of trying to muzzle the media before the presidential election.

Mr. Yeltsin, 65, in contrast to the shambling figure he has cut in the past year when he suffered two mild heart attacks, looked and sounded sharp during his visit to Chelyabinsk.

"I'm in a fighting mood," he said, gesturing energetically during an impromptu and light-hearted question and answer session at a huge Soviet-era steel pipe plant.

Mr. Yeltsin, who has sacked several top liberals from his administration and alarmed reformers further by making several big spending promises in the last few days, is clearly aware his biggest problem is the 14-month conflict in Chechenya.

He acknowleged that his government might have made a "mistake" in its policy towards the mainly-Muslim region's drive for independence, but he assured his audience that fighting would be over by the June 16 election.

"I think the whole thing will be over in two, three or four months," he said, repeating that he foresaw a gradual Russian troop withdrawal but would also use force against the rebels.

The battles in Chechenya showed no signs of easing. Interfax news agency said nine Russian soldiers were killed in the past 24 hours, higher than the average toll in recent months.

The press service of interior ministry forces said Chechen fighters launched mortar attacks against Russian positions near the village of Novogroznensky in the east of the territory.

Local journalists said Russian troops shelled rebel positions near Novogroznensky, which had been used by the rebels as their base several weeks ago. Residents said the rebels had moved out but Russian troops continued shooting.

Mexican government hails Chiapas accord

SAN ANDRES LARRAINZAR, Mexico (R) — Zapatista rebels signed their first peace accord with the Mexican government Friday, taking a major step toward ending a two-year Indian uprising in the southern state of Chiapas.

"The peace process has entered a decisive phase," the government said in a statement after the signing ceremony, which took place behind closed doors in this mountain town 750 kilometres southeast of Mexico City.

Chief government envoy Marco Bernal said the talks had entered an "irreversible" stage while legislators mediating the talks said "a new day has dawned for Mexicans."

The rebels played down the accord, however, saying it was just a small first step towards peace.

"The documents signed here are a small accord, a small step, let's not fool ourselves ... This is not the peace accord," ski-masked Zapatista leader Comandante David said at a news conference. "We want peace, but a new peace with justice and dignity, not the peace of the graveyard."

Plans for a live televised signing were cancelled at the last moment at the rebels' request.

But Sergio Arturo Venegas, a member of the government delegation, told reporters the deal was sealed at noon local time (1800 GMT).

The agreement covering Indian rights and culture was the first peace accord signed by the Zapatistas since they launched their armed uprising on New Year's day in 1994. It came after 10 months of tough on-and-off negotiations.

The immediate practical effect was likely to be slight since fighting in Chiapas virtually ceased in 1994, but the government hailed "the first solid foundation of the accord of concord and pacification.

Italians brace for bitter election campaign

ROME (R) — Italians was plunged into a bitter general election campaign after President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro dissolved parliament, finally accepting that fractious politicians in the legislature could never form a coalition.

Polls were set for April 21, three years ahead of schedule, after the centre-right and centre-left blocs failed to agree on key reforms that could have led to a new government.

The opening salvoes of Italy's third election campaign in four years were fired immediately after Mr. Scalfaro's decision was announced Friday.

Umberto Bossi, whose federalist Northern League Party has yet to side with either the centre-right Freedom Alliance or the centre-left Olive Tree Coalition, said the election would be won by "whoever ends up with the league."

Mr. Bossi, in a flourish of his trademark secessionist rhetoric, told supporters that "the campaign battle would end up with the victory of the north."

The campaign seemed certain to focus on former Premier Silvio Berlusconi, expected to be the centre-right's candidate for prime minister, and the likely candidate for the centre-left, Catholic economist Romano Prodi.

Berlusconi is on trial in Milan accused of graft related to his Fininvest business empire and may face another trial on charges of illegally channelling funds to disgraced ex-socialist Prime Minister Bettino Craxi.

The two blocs will be battling for the centre ground of Italy's divided political landscape, searching for big name supporters to convince voters of their moderate credentials.

"It is clear that, if the centre-right wins the elections, Italy will be governed and, if the left wins, ingovernability will reign," said Rocco Buttiglione, head of the small CDU Party in the Freedom Alliance.

Massimo d'Alema, leader of the ex-Communist Democratic Party Of The Left (PDS), largest force in the olive tree coalition, said it was the only grouping that could guarantee stability on financial markets.

But opinion polls suggested the new parliament, whose opening session was set for May 9, might be just as splintered as the old one. They said neither side would win a clear victory but more than a third of the voters were undecided.

The outgoing parliament was elected in March 1994 when media mogul Mr. Berlusconi stormed to victory. But his shaky coalition broke up after seven months and Mr. Scalfaro appointed Lamberto Dini, a former central banker, to lead a technocrat government.

Mr. Dini resigned 36 days ago when it became clear he no longer had majority suppport in parliament. He was expected to remain as caretaker premier during the electoral campaign, which should result in Italy's 55th government since World War II.

Mr. Scalfaro had tried for weeks to avoid holding elections in the middle of Italy's presidency of the European Union. Rome chairs the 15-nation bloc until the end of June.

But cross-party talks on key constitutional reforms broke down this week when Antonio Maccanico, a political fixer brought in by Mr. Scalfaro to try to form a government, said the rival blocs were hopelessly deadlocked.

Ukraine miners suspend strike over energy crisis

KIEV (R) — Ukraine's coal miners suspended a two-week-old strike Friday but government leaders said the stoppage had already seriously damaged the country's crisis-ridden energy sector.

Strike leaders named the deepening energy crisis in Ukraine as a key reason for suspending the strike, called on February 1 to demand months of back pay and subsidies to the ageing and loss-making sector.

"We'll fully stop the strike when our demands are satisfied," strike leader Nikolai Podgorny told Reuters.

"But the strike will create job cuts in industry and the stores of coal at thermal stations are very low. This, combined with the lengthy cold spell, could lead to catastrophe."

An unusually freezing winter has left Ukraine with thermal stations desperately short of coal and fuel oil. Nuclear power plants, which provide about 50 percent of Ukraine's electricity in winter, were working at full force.

The government ordered large factories to shut down to save energy after neighbouring Russia uncoupled Ukraine from a joint power grid this week.

Rotating power cuts leave people in the dark for hours at a time in many parts of the country, even in the suburbs of Kiev.

Prime Minister Vasyl Yevtukhov said the strike had only served to worsen an already critical situation. Russia was unlikely, he said, to hook up Ukraine to the energy grid in the next few days.

"The miners' strike in Ukraine has ended, and the only result is big losses to the economy," yevtukhov told Reuters.

"It was absolutely unnecessary. The damages total several million tonnes of coal that we need. I see no pluses for the miners — only minuses. Their slogans were sheer populism."

Trade union leaders said they would continue to press for talks with the government on economic demands. They did not say when the strike might resume.

The government has doled out $ 79 million in back pay — about two-thirds of what miners were demanding — but mindful of obligations to the International Monetary Fund, says it will provide no more funds from the budget.

The strike began fizzling out over the past week after a strong start in most pits in the Donbass coal mine in eastern Ukraine. On Thursday, trade unions said 33 of Ukraine's 250 mines were not working and 93 were refusing to load coal.

Taiwan sauna blaze kills 17, none believed injured

TAIPEI (R) — Fire swept through a four-storey sauna building in Taiwan's central city of Taichung Saturday, killing 17 people, a fire department official said.

"Seventeen people are dead and we found nobody injured," the official said by telephone. He said he believed there were no other people in the building at the time.

"According to initial investigations, all the 17 are male, and I have ordered police to try to identify them and investigate the cause of the fire as soon as possible," state television quoted an unnamed prosecutor as saying.

The prosecutor did not say if all the victims were customers of the sauna. The staff of most saunas in Asia are predominantly female.

The fire department official could not confirm that all the dead were men.

James Soong, governor of the Taiwan province, said oo television that officials had last year ordered the sauna closed for safety reasons, but that it had remained open after a different owner's name was registered.

"Illegal ones can never change registration (from now on). Today, detain the related bosses (of the sauna) immediately," Soong said angrily.

About 100 firefighters with 25 fire engines took more than one hour to control the blaze, which erupted at 8.13 a.m. (0013 GMT). A witness said the fire began on the second floor of the building, state televisioo said.

"(The inside) has been burned seriously everywhere, a terrible scene you won't want to see," a firefighter said on television.

The building was covered by iron-plated signboards, making it difficult for anyone inside to escape, television said.

Rio carnival swings into action

RIO DE JANEIRO (R) — Rio de Janeiro's carnival throbbed into action Friday night, with its usual array of semi-naked dancers, exuberant costumes and a healthy dosage of security.

The first official parade by the samba schools through the city's concrete sambadrome featured the lowest grade of the second-tier groups, known as schools, yearning for the limelight and occasional riches that fall on the top-rank competitors.

Among them were the notorious "favelas," or slums, that sprawl across the hillsides ringing Brazil's tourist capital.

The feather-clad dancers, drummers in exotic costumes and youths pushing the ornate floats save for up to a year to help the samba schools in their neighbourhoods climb the ranks of carnival stars, while at the same time carrying a message.

"I only want peace, love and happiness," sang the 300-odd-strong troupe from the slum of Vigario Geral, notorious for its violence and for a 1993 massacre blamed on the police in which 21 people died.

The expensive stalls, which cost $36,000 each, were noticeably empty for the lower rank schools.

But the concrete stands at the entrance to the sambadrome, where the poor people sit, were fuller and writhing to the deep beat of samba blaring from giant loudspeakers.

Carnival organisers had feared that four days of torrential downpour the previous weekend meant the four-day feast of dancing and promiscuity would be a washout.

But Friday was clear and sunny, and the forecast for the weekend was reasonably bright.

Commentators have said that interest in Rio's official prelenten parades was dropping because of the over-commercialization of the event, highly geared toward the tourist trade.

But Paulo Cesar Champoudry, the "rei momo," or fat king of this year's carnival, weighing in at an impressive 451 pounds (204.5 kg), said he believed the event was recapturing its fading roots in the hot-blooded beat of samba.

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Meeting of minds, goals

HIS MAJESTY King Hussein's recent talks with the Saudi and Egyptian leaderships have produced a number of positive results. On the Saudi front, there was not only the reestablishment of normal relations after a hiatus of several years but also the promise of strengthened ties. The warming up of relations with Riyadh was swiftly followed by an agreement on the principles of renewed cooperation with Kuwait as well. The opening with Kuwait has been translated into an extremely positive development, namely the decision to free Jordanian prisoners and detainees accused of having collaborated with the Iraqi occupying forces in 1990 and aiding and abetting Baghdad's claims on the Arab Gulf state.

Likewise, the Egyptian-Jordanian talks this time have been the warmest and most fruitful in years, as Jordanian officials maintain. The fact that the King quickly returned President Mubarak's visit to Aqaba which took place last December is in itself a clear signal that we are the last to question Cairo's central role in the Arab World. There was some unfounded suspicions in the past entertained by some circles in Egypt that Jordan aimed by its recent flurry of activity, to preempt Egypt's long-standing position of leadership. Now it has become evident that Jordan's natural right to assert its vital place in the region's future is never intended to materialise at the expense of other Arabs especially the Egyptians or the Saudis. No wonder King Hussein has regarded his fresh contacts with the Saudi and Egyptian leaders as a prelude to a new era in Arab history based on commonality of interests and heightened awareness of the contemporary challenges.

No doubt the Iraqi file has figured highly in all these talks and the frank discussions on its future removed doubts about the ultimate intentions of Jordan vis-a-vis its neighbouring Arab state. His Majesty repeatedly made his intentions known when he drew a distinction between the welfare of the Iraqi people whom we all will continue to support and the ruling regime's grip on power which he believes only the Iraqi people must decide on. Obviously there was a meeting of the minds between Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt on the need to preserve the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq. This much the whole Arab World agrees on. Anything beyond these basic tenets has to be resolved by the Iraqi people including the bankruptcy of the Saddam regime itself.

The continued boycott against Baghdad by its neighbouring Arab states is a clear signal of where they stand for now. This implies that the full rehabilitation of Iraq into the Arab fold cannot be realised under the current circumstances. The ball is therefore in Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's court. If a peaceful transition to a new order in Iraq is allowed to take place, then Iraq's larger national interests stand to be promoted and safeguarded. Hopefully the present Iraqi leadership will put the national interests of their country and people above all other considerations and will make the necessary sacrifices for these national interests.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

COMMENTING ON King's Hussein's recent visits to Cairo and Saudi Arabia, a writer for Al Ra'i daily said that the King's moves indicate that he has a certain project he wants to submit to the Arab League, probably aimed at reviving inter-Arab solidarity. Fahed Al Fanek said that since the meetings the King held with Arab leaders were behind closed doors, there is no way of knowing the actual topics discussed and therefore one can only expect to see the outcome of these encounters in the coming months. However, said the writer, the meetings can be described as useful since they offered a chance for sounding out each party's position regarding various issues of concern to them. The journalists accompanying the King on the visit to Cairo know about these meetings as much as the general public and no more, simply because the meetings were behind closed doors. The only matter the journalists are certain about at this stage, he added, is their knowledge that King Hussein places his people's interest above all other considerations, and that he never embarks on a project before paving the ground for his moves.

IT IS regrettable that Cabinet members serving as ministers for the first time in the present government have not learned from the past experiences of former colleagues and indulge in giving statements about reform they intend to carry out without due preparation, said a writer for Al Dustour. Many of the new ministers have been claiming that they will eliminate inefficiency and end routine in their respective offices, repeating statements of all previous ministers who also meant well but failed to do anything about the situation, said Abdullah Al Khatib. Ministers, as well as the members of the public, realise too well that we do not live in an age of miracles, neither does the government possess supernatural powers that could induce change overnight, the writer argued. Moreover, they have no magic wands with which to carry out programmes overnight and therefore one should not be over optimistic about their achievements in advance, he added. He said that anyway Jordanian citizens are not concerned with seeing any change but one whose results they can feel and whose improvements show in the public administration as well as the country's social and economic life.

Sunday's Economic Pulse

By Dr. Fahed Al Fanek

Bridges with West Bank still opened in one direction

THE PRIME minister of the previous government, Sharif Zeid Ben Shaker, agreed with Zuhdi Al Nashashibi, the finance minister of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), to enhance the exchange of goods between the two parties and to activate the economic agreements that had already been signed but were dormant. They had also agreed to activate the joint committees and make them start working. So far those committees did not meet because the Palestinian delegations simply did not show up at the agreed time and venue.

Unfortunately, the agreement between the Jordanian prime minister and the Palestinian minister of finance is useless and has no value as long as the PNA does not control the bridges and is not authorised to decide on commodities that may or may not be imported from Jordan.

Agreements of this kind place commitments on the Jordanian side, which can be implemented, in return for commitments on the Palestinian side, that cannot be implemented without the prior consent of a third party, namely Israel. Even when Jordan was able to secure the consent of Israel for a limited amount of Jordanian products to be exported to the West Bank before a set date, the implementation was blocked by the PNA, then in Gaza.

Official statistics, which were not published in Jordan, show that the trade between Jordan and the self-rule areas during the last eight months of 1995 reached $52 million, and that 90 per cent of this amount represent Palestinian products imported to Jordan while only 10 per cent represent Jordanian products exported to the West Bank.

If this is true, then the government of Jordan is in fact deceiving itself when it signs agreements on certain matters with a party that has no power to make a decision or honour its commitments regarding these matters, while the Jordanian government is silent or helpless towards Israel that can make decisions on these matters.

In this respect, we should recall that the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel called for the abolition of all kinds of economic boycott. Jordan took the legal procedures for the removal of boycott against Israel, but it seems that Jordanian products are still subjected to Israeli de facto boycott, not only in the Israeli market, but also in the Palestinian market, all under the pretext of security.

Based on the above information and estimates, the trade deficit with the West Bank reached $42 million in the eight months mentioned. It is not alarming to carry a trade deficit with Palestine. After all, we tolerate higher deficits with foreign countries but not because those countries block our exports.

The problem in this case is that a trade deficit with the West Bank means more Jordanian dinars accumulating in the West Bank. It is not wise to allow at least JD 30 million more in eight months only to accumulate in the West Bank, and thus cause our future problem to grow until it explodes upon the issuance of a Palestinian currency at some point in time. To recover part of the dinars in the West Bank, Jordan should export more.

The Jordanian government should face the facts and do something about them. We should know, in no ambiguous terms, whether the bridges and the crossings are actually open to our products going westwards, in accordance with the letter and spirit of the peace treaty and trade agreements with both Israel and the PNA, or that they are open in one direction, as was the case before peace.

So far, the Jordanian products are unable to cross the borders freely. They are treated as if they were loaded with explosives and driven by potential terrorists and, therefore, subject to thorough searching, including unloading which causes damages, delays, and prohibitive and unnecessary cost.

Islam's new Egyptian face

THE SPECTRE of Egypt following Algeria's bloody path to civil war haunts the Middle East. Islam's revivalist movement was born in Egypt. Its militant practitioners last year attempted to kill President Hosni Mubarak, having in 1981 succeeded in killing his predecessor, Anwar Sadat. Selective murders by Islamic Jihad and other armed groups kept intellectuals nervous — and many visitors out of Egypt — for several years. Thanks to the regime's brutal counterattack, the fear has receded. For how long? Egypt's Islamic militancy, though now repressed and outmanoeuvred, has a way of reappearing, often in new mutations.

Islamic extremism, said Mr. Mubarak last week, is a "cancerous phenomenon" that needs to be wrenched out by the roots. Thousands of Islamic radicals (some of them far from militant) moulder in prison. The military courts that began hearing "terrorist" cases three years ago have sent 48 men to the gallows. Six more were sentenced to death in January on charges of arms trafficking; their lawyers claimed that they had confessed under torture. This policy has kept most of Egypt calm, and has all but stifled unrest in the poor south. Tourists have swarmed back; 3 million visitors in 1995, 20 per cent more than the year before.

The government is determined to keep them coming. The election last November brought in a parliament eager to rubber-stamp a broad assault on politicised Islam. The sweep of arrests has widened: along with people sworn to armed revolt, activists in the Muslim Brotherhood have received stiff sentences. This, plus a range of other measures, has ended the Brotherhood's control of professional syndicates. The doctors', laywers' and engineers' unions are no longer platforms for the call for a return to Islamic traditionalism.

Secularities can take further comfort from a new law that will shield them from being tried for heresy. In recent years this seemed a real threat as bigoted litigants tormented artists, writers and Islamic reformers. One professor at Cairo University, Nasr Abu Zeid, was told that his interpretation of the Koran marked him as an apostate, making his marriage to his Muslim wife invalid. The new law, rushed through parliament last week, requires plaintiffs who sue in supposed "defence of the Muslim community" to channel their cases through the state prosecutor, not direct to the courts.

Countries that were once blamed by Mr. Mubarak for giving refuge to wanted Islamists may now be changing course. The Egyptian government was delighted in mid-January when an American court sentenced the spiritual head of Egypt's armed Islamic Leagues, Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman, to life imprisonment for plotting to blow up buildings in New York City. Egypt's minister of the interior, Hassan Alfi, returned recently from a conference of Arab police ministers boasting a new cross-border coordination between security agencies. Fugitive "spreaders of poison," he claimed, now have few places to hide.

Success of a sort, but critics have long chided Mr. Mubarak for seeing his opponents strictly as a security problem. That approach has worked only up to a point: each time the Islamists lost one outlet of expression, they found another. When their armed extremists began to be crushed by the police, the increasingly Islamist-dominated judiciary set legal precedents that alarmed Egyptian secularists. When the Muslim Brotherhood was barred from politics, it extended its influence elsewhere, particularly in the professional syndicates.

There are now signs that the Islamist movement may again be adopting a new guise. Politics has long been dominated by the ageing bosses of parties that scarcely challenge Mr. Mubarak. In a break with tradition, a group of younger Muslim Brothers, many of them former activists in the syndicates, has announced a new political party. Artfully, they call it the Centre Party, and its founders include not only a few left-wingers but even some Coptic Christians. This is a novelty: Copts in southern Egypt have been a target for Islamist extremists. The party still needs official approval to function. But its mere creation reflects Egyptian impatience with stale party polarities.

Both the Centre Party and the Brotherhood say they will pursue change by legal means only. Mustafa Mashhour, who took over as the Brotherhood's leader two weeks ago, said that, whatever the provocation, it would not resort to violence or underground activity. This does not mean that violence will stop: it may merely move abroad, as in the suicide bombing that last year wrecked Egypt's embassy in Pakistan.

Islamic Jihad, which claimed to have carried out that attack, boasts that it has more in store. Its latest communique explains that its men are willing to blow themselves up because the government leaves them no other means to effect change. Look at the Muslim Brothers, the statement says: as a reward for taking the legal path and playing the government's game, its members are thrown in prison and tried by military courts.

Egyptians overwhelmingly reject armed revolt but these frustrations are widely echoed. A deep-rooted religious revival, fortified by economic and social strains, has made many people question the regime's legitimacy. When Mr. Mubarak denounces his enemies as tools of Satan and praises the police for their law-abiding heroism, as he did in a speech last week, his people react with scepticism. Abul Ella Madi, the youthful leader of the Centre Party, offers a different approach. Terrorism can be solved, he says, "by granting constitutional freedoms, by opening the national dialogue to involve all factions, by widening the scope of social justice, narrowing gaps between classes and solving unemployment." He speaks as an Islamist. But what he says is what Egyptian liberals have been saying all along.

The Economist

Exchanging gifts, and other things

By Dr. Yusuf Mansur

ECONOMISTS ALWAYS think of ways to arrive at optimal outcomes from the least amount of input because resources are scarce and since the days of dictating to people what they should consume and shouldn't are over, economists seek and preach efficiency; i.e., getting more with less. Thus, economists are different from other social scientists by their consideration of alternative ways of things. However, this approach leads economists to some seemingly bizarre solutions to everyday problems. The following are some examples of how economists apply rational behaviour to human behaviour.

• A few years ago an economist published an empirical research paper on the custom of exchanging gifts at Christmas. Anyone who has participated in this custom knows about all those gifts that need to be returned. People go so far as to indicate what store the gift was purchased from by leaving the tag on (without the price of course) should the recipient wish to return the gift.

The economist, whose article was published in the American Economic Review (the most prestigious economic journal in the world) estimated the loss to the U.S. economy as a result of people spending money on gifts that others do not want; the loss, if I recall correctly, was $14 billion. The author suggested an alternative method: people should exchange money instead of gifts or if they really want to give each other presents, then they should ask each other what they want before they purchase the gift(s). Yes, this is the advice of the economist; dry, yet it does suggest rational behaviour.

• The second example is the famous Battle of Sexes game. In this highly sophisticated theoretic problem game we have a normal couple where the wife likes to watch ballet and the husband likes to watch boxing. Come weekend, they have to choose where to go, whether to "fist or to "foot" it. Assuming that they both get the same satisfaction from doing their respective activities and get the same pain from watching the other person's favourite activity, we have a problem that needs to be resolved.

The economist's solution is that since there are two equally good outcomes, going to the ballet or going to a boxing match, they should go to the ballet one weekend and go to the match the next. Thus, they both win and they both lose, instead of one winning and one losing.

I do not think that this outcome is too far from reality. Any happily married person will agree that one gives some and takes some and the trick is to at least come out even.

• Another example of how economists think also comes from game theory, the famous Prisoner's Dilemma. In this game, and if you are a fan of economic theory you would think this is the only game there is, two criminals are arrested and put in separate cells in the course of an investigation. If both confess, they each get a light sentence, say one year. However, if only one of them confesses he gets six months and the other gets four years. If both stonewall, then they both go free. The outcome is that they both confess. Why? Because even though it is optimal to stonewall, neither of the crooks can trust the other not to confess. In other words, both players pay the price of ignorance by confessing.

"Economists are different from other social scientists by their consideration of alternative ways of things."

The lesson from this game is: if you are a police officer and you arrest two suspects, put them in separate rooms and tell them about the outcome; you won't have to lie to them — they will confess. One caveat: the result of this game can change if the game is repeated. In other words, if the crooks know that they will play this game again in the future, they learn to trust each other and never confess because the traitor in a game gets punished in the next game.

Yes, if you were an economist, you would ask your loved ones what they wanted in terms of gifts for the Eid, you would let your wife take you to visit her boring friends as long as she promises to do the same for you sometime, and if you wanted to commit a crime you wouldn't do it with a partner unless you have both done time together before. But most importantly, you should always remember that a rational economic person spends his money on whatever gives him the greatest pleasure.

During this Eid do not give gifts to people you do not like. Furthermore, do not even visit them because time is money, whether you are an economist or not. Happy Eid.

Are British newspapers biased?

By Nicola Hobday

THE BEAVER is a newspaper that represents the students at the London School of Economics (LSE) and, although they are a diverse bunch, the limits of this market means that we can allow ourselves to show support for certain issues or at times be, dare I say it, biased. Having said that, we do usually try to get a balanced view on most subjects publishing replies to articles that may have presented a one-sided argument.

However, what kind of precedent should be set by national newspapers? Should they feel obliged to show both sides of an issue? Most national newspapers have some kind of political bias and readers are aware of this before they read the paper. For example, the Daily Telegraph is a well-known Tory newspaper whereas The Guardian is known to be rather more left wing. However, should these papers be expected to show a balanced argument alongside an acceptable level of political imbalance.

Perhaps this is unreasonable in matters of British politics where the average reader would already know the basic argument and would probably want to know what the newspaper's opinions on subjects like Harriet Harmon or Fat Cat pay. If we take into consideration articles about highly sensitive issues that aren't in British politics then perhaps newspapers should be a little more careful.

The example to which I am really alluding is an article written in the Daily Telegraph on January 23 by General Ariel Sharon, ex-defence minister of Israel. This article was found to be one-sided and controversial by LSE student Lu'ayy Minwer Al Rimawi, who is president of the LSE Jordanian Society. He claimed that he and others found the article "non-objective and even offensive" and that it would not help the cause of peace as "it completely denied Palestinians' rightful claims to Arab East Jerusalem."

He wrote a reply to the article putting across the other side of the argument and this letter later received the support of the official representative of the PLO. However, this reply was not published even though it was the only reply received about this article. Lu'ayy believes that the Daily Telegraph has stifled the debate by not printing his or any reply to the article. Lu'ayy has had his views on Arab-Israeli problems printed in other Western media including the Independent and The Guardian and the International Herald Tribune.

His case is that when a national newspaper publishes a controversial article it comes under an implicit duty to publish some of the responses that the article provokes. When Lu'ayy raised the matter with the editor's secretary she acknowledged having received the letter but nothing was done to remedy the situation.

In the name of unbiased journalism I endeavoured to find out the views of the Daily Telegraph on the subject. The letters editor spoke to me and claimed that he had received many phone calls from Lu'ayy Al Rimawi and that he was waiting to hear back from him. The Daily Telegraph receive about one hundred letters per day and therefore only about five per cent get printed. The letters editor revealed that he had been "pestered" by Lu'ayy but that they had been about to print his letter, they were, however, waiting for him to call them back as he had been asked to do. When asked whether his reply would now be printed I was told that as the article 'was a long time ago they would have to consider whether the letter was still relevant.

Is this a devious plot by the Daily Telegraph to stifle debate over the Arab-Israeli issue? Are they being irresponsible by not printing a reply by a response to a controversial article on a particularly volatile subject?

I remain unbiased and impartial as ever. However, Lu'ayy hopes that you will take this matter seriously, that of "denying moderate Arab voices being aired, while simultaneously giving a free hand to nationalist Israeli authors with prejudicial views." He is planning to boycott the Daily Telegraph and encourages others to do so.

Responses to this article will be published, honest!

The Beaver

An activist for the Awami League yells his support for party leader Sheikh Hassina as she addresses a rally in Dhaka one day after the national elections were boycotted by all main opposition groups (Reuter photo)

Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina chases power

By Anis Ahmed
Reuter

DHAKA — Bangladeshi opposition leader Sheikh Hasina has for decades pursued an elusive dream of stepping into the shoes of her assassinated father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh's first president.

In the process, the soft-spoken Awami League chief has seen most of her family slain in the military coup which toppled her father, spent months in detendon and lived abroad for six years in self-imposed exile.

She lent her popularity to strengthen a campaign by current Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia which toppled army autocrat General Hossain Mohammad Ershad in 1990.

She then contested the 1991 parliamentary elections but that only reaffirmed her position as opposition leader.

She is still chasing her dream of power but on the eve of the parliamentary elections — which major opposition parties are boycotting in a long-running feud with Ms. Khaleda's ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) — still seems nowhere near her goal.

Sheikh Hasina, 48, has led her father's party with a determination and stoicism that has often earned her criticism within and outside her party. She has often said one of her principal objectives in politics is to put her father's killers on trial.

Ever since Ershad's fall in a 1990 popular uprising, Ms. Hasina has remained pitted against Ms. Khaleda in her quest for power.

Ms. Hasina, however, insists she what she really wants to do is to establish a flawless demoeracy and a foolproof system of clean voting in this south Asian country.

Her boycott of Thursday week's elections has been prompted by opposition fears that any election with Ms. Khaleda in power will be unfair. The prime minister refused to resign and transfer power to a neutral administration before the polls.

Ms. Hasina claims much of the Bangladeshi nation is with her in the campaign for clean elections but Ms. Khaleda remains undaunted. Other main opposition parties are also boycotting the elections.

Ms. Hasina publicly accuses Ms. Khaleda of "trying to reestablish autocracy" and calls for resisting what she terms as an "election farce".

Political analysts say Ms. Hasina has become more desperate as she believes Ms. Khaleda is still enjoying strong backing from Bangladesh's overseas donors, including the United States.

Born on September 28, 1947, at Tungipara village in northern Bangladesh (in what was then east Pakistan), Ms. Hasina graduated from Dhaka university in 1973.

She gained her early political experience as a go-between for her father, who led Bangladesh to independence in 1971, and his student followers.

Ms. Hasina and her sister, Sheikh Rehana, were on a visit to West Germany when army officers staging a coup d'etat on August 15, 1975, killed her father, mother, three brothers and several relatives.

The two sisters remained in self-imposed exile in West Germany and other countries for six years until 1981.

Returning home, Ms. Hasina became leader of the Awami League and reshaped it into a major political force.

She was arrested several times during the rule of Ershad, a former general who seized power in a bloodless coup in March 1982 and was forced to resign in December 1990.

Ms. Hasina was chosen as head of a 15-party opposition alliance that challenged Ershad's power in the 1986 parliamentary elections.

She proved her popularity by winning three constituencies, including one in Dhaka. The country's constitution allows one candidate to stand in up to five seats but he or she can retain one only and must vacate the rest.

Although Ms. Hasina claimed her alliance had won more than two-thirds of the 300 seats in parliament, official results gave her only 104.

Despite pressure from colleagues to boycott parliament, Ms. Hasina entered it as leader of the opposition using it as a platform to challenge Ershad.

When Ershad dissolved parliament on December 6, 1987 she hit the streets again, demanding free elections and Ershad's resignation.

Widely travelled, Sheikh Hasina has attended international seminars in the United States, Asia and Europe.

She is an avid reader of books and journals on international politics. A devout Muslim, she visited Mecca in 1985.

Married to nuclear physicist Dr Wazed Ali Miah, Ms. Hasina has two children, a son and a daughter.

Indians queue up to learn to climb coconut trees

By *William Rhode*
Reuter

CALICUTA, India — The tax collector looked up nervously, invoked the blessings of the gods and slipped his bare feet into a small loop of coconut husk rope.

Arms wrapped around a coconut tree trunk and machete in hand, plump U.K.S. Chauhan, a tax official in southern India, prepared to inaugurate the world's first coconut tree climbers' college with a mighty leap.

Mr. Chauhan's effort took him up the coconut tree about 60 centimetres above the cheering crowds of Calicut, a small coastal town in southwest India's Kerala State.

But his victory was short-lived. Before he could get any further up the tree on his hazardous journey to the fan-shaped fronds, his worried wife yanked him down to collapse on to his adoring fans.

The fans paid no heed. The music commenced, a ritual coconut was smashed and the crowd cheered. The Calicut Coconut Tree Climbers' Training College had been inaugurated.

"Let's all climb (coconut trees)," exulted Ramdas Vaidyar, chairman of the coconut tree climbers' promoting committee. "No one will be refused. Caste barriers have been torn down."

Vaidyar said Kerala's traditional coconut tree climbers, members of the low-caste Thiya community, were becoming scarce.

Many Thiya, in search of higher status white-collar jobs, have given up the family trade to take advantage of affirmative action programmes launched by the Indian government.

But the college, which will not charge students, aims to change all that, officials said.

"This college will bring a social transformation," said K.F. George, one of seven people who contributed to the college.

"It will lift the down-trodden coconut climbers from the mire and the slush. It will remove the stigma and bring dignity to the profession."

Kerala, the "land of the coconut", has over 200 million coconut trees, which yield an annual crop of five billion coconuts.

But the region faces an economic crisis as coconut climbers move into other trades and the tradition dies out, Mr. Vaidyar said.

He said a scarcity of climbers meant fewer coconuts were being collected.

"There is a scarcity of climbers in Kerala. Unharvested coconuts are hanging heavy and fewer people know how to collect them any more," Mr. Vaidyar said.

Coconuts are vital to Kerala's agrarian economy.

They are processed for their rich oil, soaked and woven to make coir rope, fed to cattle and fermented for toddy, or coconut beer.

"The unemployed youth of Kerala should capitalise on all the opportunities in the traditional economy, particularly the agricultural sector," a pulling Chauhan said.

"India is so well-endowed with natural resources we should make the most of them," he added.

Coconut tree climbers can earn 100 rupees ($2.77) in two hours and 6,000 rupees ($166) a month, a college official said.

"White-collar workers have to slog for eight hours a day for half that salary," said college Vice-Chairman C.D. Nambiar.

Two hundred people applied to join the college's first course, which lasts for three months and is scheduled to end in April. But only 10 were selected.

One of the students said he wanted to climb coconut trees as a part-time profession.

"Coconut tree climbing is challenging and you can earn good money," the mathematics and computer science graduate said.

Students receive a certificate after completing the gruelling course, which includes physical training, technical skills and religious rites to earn the tree's respect, the college principal, Professor A.P. Pradeep said.

Greek-Turkish crisis puts remote island on the map

By Dina Kyriakidou
Reuter

KASTELLORIZO, Greece — A military helicopter thundered above the scenic harbour, rocking the small wooden fishing boats, as Greek commandos in combat gear landed on this remote Aegean island.

The soldiers were sent to Kastellorizo to defend Greece's most distant outpost against a possible threat from Turkey, a stone's throw away, after a spat last month between the feuding NATO allies over a deserted islet.

Local residents were busy loading a two-metre long swordfish on the boat that brought the soldiers in. Centuries of hardship, marked by war, famine and isolation have made them weary of the threat of military conflict.

"We were a bit worried but time goes by quietly here and we've acquired a kind of immunity. We've had much worse in the past," Papa Giorgis, the island's priest, told Reuters.

The latest Greek-Turkish crisis over a rocky outcrop near the island of Kalymnos to the north seems to have put the far-off, neglected little island back on the map.

Greek government officials and television channels have rushed to Kastellorizo, along with generous donations, while the military has boosted its thin presence here.

But locals, tired of what they say are years of indifference from the state, put on a brave face and say they are prepared to defend their homes themselves.

"We were concerned when we heard Kastellorizo would be Turkey's first target in case of war," said Mayor Pavlos Panigyris, 40. "But all men here are assigned a rifle and we will use it to defend our homes. We will not surrender."

Hanging off the easternmost edge of Europe, Kastellorizo is four hours by boat from the nearest Greek island of Rhodes and only 10 minutes from the Turkish tourist town of Kas.

Once a flourishing community of worldly sea traders and a population of 17,000, the barren island has dwindled down to about 200 people who survive on fishing and the few tourists that dare to venture this far.

With Turkey three miles across the sea and easily cut off from the Greek mainland by bad weather, Kastellorizo has developed a symbiotic relationship with Kas.

Medical emergencies are sometimes rushed there and islanders often slip by the harbour patrol boat, which tries to stop Kurdish refugees from illegally crossing the water, to smuggle in fresh groceries in the dark.

Kas boatmen in turn bring tourists for day trips to the island in the summer and foreigners who need to extend their visas to Turkey in the winter.

Turkish boat Captain Turcan Guglu, an affable young man popular with the locals, said the recent spat did not affect relations between people in Kastellorizo and Kas.

Five prostitutes from Georgia stood by his caique while their passports were stamped, eyeing about 20 disbevelled Kurds waiting a few steps away for medical check ups before travelling on to Athens.

"The day after the incident there were Turkish boats in this harbour and there were greeks in Kas. People here treat me the same. This incident is all due to politics and it's bad for tourism, for the economy, for everything," Mr. Guglu said.

His views were echoed by many on Kastellorizo, who feel relieved that Greece reached a compromise during the duel to avoid war. The Socialist government was harshly criticised in Athens for accepting a U.S.-brokered deal to defuse the crisis.

"What did they want? War? Don't they stop to think what it would mean for people, for our development?," asked Evangelia Mayafi, 60, who as a child witnessed the World War II bombing that almost levelled the island.

Kastellorizians find it difficult to view the Turkish people across the stretch of water separating them as enemies but deeply mistrust the government in Ankara.

"We had hoped that (Turkish caretaker Prime Minister Tansu) Ciller would be more compassionate, being a woman, but she turned out to be a warmonger," Ms. Mayafi said.

And even Papa Giorgis, who was tried and acquitted in 1981 for illegally rushing a heart attack victim to Kas and who last month took his son-in-law there after an accident, vows he would take up arms to defend his island.

"What's important is to save a life. I would help anyone in need, even an enemy soldier if he was hurt, but that does not mean that we will not respond to an attack," the priest said.

Briton Shakle Kys, a yacht repairer who has lived on the island since 1992, says Greeks and Turks get along here but tensions between the two governments were bound to affect them.

"I think the deep, old fear of "the dreaded Turk' is still there," Mr. Kys said.

As if to exorcise such fears, the men gathered at the island's taverna for what they now call their "Pentagon" meetings, call each other "general" or "admiral" amid merciless teasing and raucous laughter.

"We started a fund-raiser to buy a frigate to patrol the waters here," said proprietor Vangelis Mavros.

"It costs two billion drachmas ($8.2 million) and we've already collected 15,000 ($60). We should buy it in two years, tops," Mr. Mavros said and his customers doubled over with laughter.

The computer is going to get even better

By Randall Mikkelsen
Reuter

PHILADELPHIA — Fifty years after the birth of the computer launched a worldwide information revolution, experts say the machines will continue growing smaller, faster and more pervasive.

"They'll become more accessible," said Frank Friedman, head of the Computer Science Department at Temple University. "Storage will increase, speed will increase, the overall capability will increase."

In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the public unveiling in Philadelphia of the first electronic computer — the Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer (ENIAC) — on Feb. 14, 1946, computer professionals are assessing how far the machine has come and where it is headed.

These experts say later advances in computer power and cost may have been less dramatic than ENIAC's development, which represented what Paul Shaffer, curator of the ENIAC Museum at the University of Pennsylvania, called the greatest technological leap in history.

But the computer has nonetheless progressed at a breakneck pace and is likely to continue doing so for the forseeable future. This will bring computers into more and more homes and into more areas of life than ever before.

Tim Bergin, a computer science professor at American University in Washington, said miniaturisation of the computer will increase its use in other products such as cars and home appliances. "Computers are just blending in," he said. "The only safe prediction is it is going to be less visible."

Mr. Friedman said future gains in computing power will have striking applications in graphics and hasten the merging of computer and television technology. "I expect pretty soon the use of computers and tv will be seamless," he said.

To dramatise the progress in technology, researchers at Penn, where ENIAC was developed, are placing the circuitry of that computer, which weighed 30 tonnes and took up an entire room, onto a single chip that fits easily on a fingertip.

On the commercial front, Digital Equipment Corp launched on Feb. 5 what it called the first microprocessor to have the speed of a supercomputer but that runs on aa batteries and sells for less than $50.

Some experts have begun to predict the decline of the personal computer as an all-around tool. Industry leaders such as oracle's chief executive Larry Ellison, saying personal computers are too complex and too expensive for many uses, plan to launch more specialised versions such as a low-priced "appliance" for cruising the Internet.

Mr. Shaffer said the current generation of personal computers was nearing an evolutionary dead-end after nearly two decades, hamstrung by limitations in its original design.

As an example of future possibilities for the personal computer, Mr. Shaffer cited Be Inc, founded five years ago by an apple computer alumnus. The company is about to launch a competitively priced desktop computer with two high-speed processors and numerous ports for attaching accessories, and Mr. Shaffer said it promises to offer much more capability to run several programmes at once.

How computers will affect life is also under continuing debate.

Federal reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan said on Feb. 5 that the computer may still be too new for its gains to be evident but that it held potential for improved productivity and living standards. "It may be that the big increases in productivity growing out of the introduction of computers and communications equipment still lie ahead," he said.

But Mr. Friedman cautioned that its pervasiveness and power also held the potential to spread mischief on a grand scale. "The computer makes lots of things easy," he said. "While there's nothing new that people can do, the damage can be done on a much larger scale and much quicker."

Somali court opens trial of 21 men charged with possession of firearms

MOGADISHU (R) — A court of Somali elders on Saturday opened the trial of 21 men charged with illegal possession of firearms, supporting anti-Islamists and sponsoring organised crime in northern Mogadishu, witnesses said.

The 21 included Abdul Rahman Gabow Mohamud, rival to north Mogadishu faction leader Ali Mahdi Mohamed. Mr. Abdul Rahman was named vice-president by self-declared President Mohamed Farah Aideed in 1994 but has repeatedly rejected the appointment.

Somalia has been without a government since the 1991 ouster of then dictator Mohamed Siad Barre.

But northern Mogadishu elders have attempted to show in recent months that they had a working Islamic judicial system and were keen to restore order.

The courts launched by Ali Mahdi, himself another self-declared president, claim to be independent and are governed by strict Muslim Sharia laws.

But often those the courts sentence — unless they are common criminals — complain of political interference in the court system. Mr. Ali Mahdi denies he interferes.

Eight of the men were set free for lack of evidence and the hearing of the charges against the other 13, including Mr. Abdulrahman, was postponed to next Saturday. Mr. Abdul Rahman said he was under persecution for political reasons.

"The court has just fulfilled the political desires of my opponent, Ali Mahdi Mohamed," Mr. Abdul Rahman told the court.

The trial session took place in a former police station, near the seaport, and was attended by dozens of civilians. Security was tight and dozens of court militia searched those who wanted to attend for weapons.

The courts rarely deal with high-profile individuals.

Capital of 4,383 new companies reach JD 412m

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The number of new companies which entered the Jordanian market in the past year reached 4,383 companies compared with 4,662 companies in 1994, a decrease by 279 companies or six per cent, a report by the Ministry of Industry and Trade has showed.

However, the report indicated that the total capital of these new companies reached JD 412.0 million ($580.2 million) compared with JD 408.4 million ($575 million) which were pumped in the market in 1994, an increase by JD 3.6 million ($5.0 million) or nine per cent.

Investments in the industrial sector in 1995 received the lion's share of the total capital with JD 157.4 million ($221.6 million) compared with JD 182.3 million ($256.7 million) in 1994. The number of the new companies in this sector reached 545 in 1995, down from 648 in 1994.

The commercial sector came second with JD 144.9 million ($204.0 million) in 1995 compared with JD 72.9 million ($102.7 million) in 1994. The number of new companies which joined this sector reached 2,883 in the past year up from 2,302 companies in 1994, an increase by 9.8 per cent.

The companies which joined the service sector came third with JD 94.9 million ($133.6 million) in 1995, down from JD 141.5 million ($199.2 million) in 1994. The number of companies which joined this sector accounted for 809 companies in 1995, compared with 1,357 in 1994, a decrease by 46.5 per cent.

The construction sector came fourth with JD 10.8 million ($15.1 million) compared with JD 11.1 million 15.6 million) in 1994. The number of companies which joined this sector reached 143 companies with 145 companies in 1994.

The agriculture sector came last with capital reaching in JD 4.1 million ($5.7 million) compared with JD 531,000 ($733,802). The total companies which joined this sector reached only three in 1994, a decrease of 672 per cent.

Despite the decrease in the total number of companies in 1995 compared with 1994, the total investments increased by 0.9 per cent, that is JD 3.6 million ($5.0 million) in the past year.

The majority of the companies which joined the market were share holding companies with a capital of JD 270.3 million ($380.7 million) down from 281.2 million ($396.0 million). These companies constituted 60 per cent of the total companies which were introduced in 1995, the number of new public share holding companies was 25 companies, the same number as in 1994.

Limited liability companies came second with investments reaching JD 86.2 million ($121.4 million), an increase by JD 16.1 million ($22.7 million) or 23 per cent over 1994. The total number of limited liability companies formed in 1995 were 412 companies in 1995 compared with 373 companies in 1994, an increase of 39 companies.

The report showed that the number of companies which raised their capitals in 1995 reached 481 companies, compared with 563 companies in 1994, a decrease by 14.5 per cent. The total capital of these companies reached JD 133.6 million ($188.1 million), a decrease by 40 per cent.

The report added that 145 limited liability companies have increased their capital while six public share holding companies have raised their capital.

The report said that 211 companies have decreased their own capitals during 1995 compared with 196 companies in 1994. The total capital that have been decreased reached JD 6.0 million ($8.4 million) compared with JD 6.6 million ($9.3 million). Nine limited liability companies have decreased their capital by JD 1.2 million ($1.7 million) while one public share holding company has decreased its capital by JD 2.3 million ($3.2 million).

The total number of companies which split in 1995 reached 1,145 companies with a capital of JD 11.34 million ($15.9 million).

Iraq would quickly regain its oil market — analysts

BAGHDAD (R) — Iraq, well-known in oil circles for its shrewd marketing, will have little difficulty regaining the market it lost once the ban on its oil exports is lifted or eased, Iraqi oil industry sources and Baghdad diplomats said.

They said Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organisation (SOMO) will waste no time in reestablishing contact with the customers it held when it was hit by United Nations sanctions after it invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

Iraq, which sits on the world's second largest oil reserves after Saudi Arabia, is conducting talks with the U.N. on how to implement a plan allowing it sell $2 billion worth of oil over six months to pay for food and other humanitarian goods.

Western oil traders say fellow OPEC members Saudi Arabia and Iran are likely to feel the heat the most when Iraq returns to the market since they will be competing for the same customers. And Iraq is likely to aggressively target refiners in the Mediterranean where Russia is also a key supplier.

SOMO has experience in regaining lost markets after it saw its exports tumble to 700,000 barrels per day (b/d) in 1983 during the 1980-1988 war with Iran from a peak of 3.25 million in 1979 only to rise to three million prior to the imposition of U.N. sanctions in 1990.

Oil experts in Iraq say the country's crude oil is considered among the highest quality produced by the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and is particularly appealing to West European and North American refiners.

Baghdad has not hidden the fact that Iraqi oil officials have stayed in touch with their old customers since the embargo and are often seen talking with Western oil company officials on the fringes of OPEC meetings.

Western businessmen have been travelling in and out of Baghdad over the past two years, either renewing past deals or striking new crude supply contracts to come into effect when the embargo is lifted or eased, Iraqi oil exports and diplomats say.

"SOMO continued contacts with foreign buyers in the past five years either directly in Baghdad or indirectly though an active office in Amman, Jordan, negotiating future contracts," said a Western diplomat in Baghdad.

The different export outlets available to Iraq in the past — Red Sea, the Gulf, terminals on the Mediterranean coast in Lebanon, Syria and Turkey — and its possession of various grades of crude helped create for Iraq an image of one of the most trustworthy suppliers in the world, industry sources say.

"Iraq, through depicted as a hawk in OPEC, priced its crude in a manner reflecting both its own interests and those of its customers," said another Western diplomat closely monitoring developments in Iraq's oil industry.

When Iraq does return to the market, either partially or fully, OPEC will face one of the greatest dilemmas in its history, OPEC delegates say.

It is still unclear how the 11 other OPEC producers will accommodate the return of Iraqi crude after an absence of more than five years. Most of them have grown comfortable producing at the higher levels they achieved to make up for the lost Iraqi supplies.

Already, the United Arab Emirates said it would not cut production if the one-time oil deal goes through.

Iraq has long insisted that it is entitled to the 3.14 million b/d OPEC quota it held when the sanctions were imposed.

Higher oil prices boost Kuwait economy, cut deficit

ABU DHABI (AFP) — An increase in oil earnings due to higher prices in 1995 boosted Kuwait's economy, largely improved its current account and cut the deficit in the state budget, an official report has showed.

Although the 1996-1997 budget has not been approved yet, preliminary figures by the finance ministry showed the deficit would be trimmed further and spending cuts would continue until the shortfall vanishes in four years.

Figures released by the Abu Dhabi-based Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) showed Kuwait's gross domestic product (GDP) grew by around 2.5 per cent in real terms in 1995 due to reforms and improvement in oil prices.

The $1.3 rise in oil prices also reduced the deficit in the budget for fiscal year 1995-1996 to around $4.3 billion from $4.97 billion in the previous fiscal year, the AMF said in its quarterly bulletin.

"The improvement in the Kuwaiti economy and budget was due to the conservative government financial policy, rationalisation of expenditure and the increase in government earnings by nearly 10 per cent," it said.

Kuwait, which controls nearly 10 per cent of the world's crude reserves, produces around two million barrels per day of oil under an output quota assigned by the 12-nation Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

Oil now provides the bulk of its income after its overseas investments of more than $100 billion were slashed to less than half to finance the liberation of the emirate from Iraqi invasion forces and rebuilding projects.

Like other Gulf oil producers, Kuwait has launched reforms to revive its economy lessen reliance on unpredictable crude exports.

According to the AMF, the Arab League's main financial organisation, Kuwait sold 12 public enterprises to the private sector in 1995 with a value of around $856 million and more ventures would be privatised this year.

The report showed Kuwait's exports, mostly crude oil and petrochemicals, increased to $12.5 billion in 1995 from $11.9 billion in 1994. This boosted the surplus in the trade balance to $5.85 billion from around $5.2 billion and that in the current account to nearly $4.2 billion from only $3.8 million.

The growth in 1995 was far higher than the average annual growth rate of 1.3 per cent targeted by the new five-year development plan, which will be endorsed by parliament soon after it was approved by the cabinet.

The plan, the most radical in Kuwait's economic history, concentrates on reforms, including expanding the private sector, tightening spending, attracting investment, raising taxes and cutting subsidies.

"One of the main objectives of this plan is to get rid of the budget deficit and reduce it to zero by the year 2000," said Jassim Al Saadun, a prominent regional economist.

Citing figures by the finance ministry, Mr. Saadun said in his weekly economic report that the shortfall was projected to be lower in the budget for fiscal year 1996-1997, which starts only July 1.

Ajman to expand free zone

ABU DHABI (AFP) — A small Gulf emirate is planning to double the area of its free zone to attract more investment from South Asia and other countries, Al Bayan newspaper reported Saturday. Ajman, a member of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), will spend around 20 million dirhams ($5.45 million) to double the zone's area to nearly 500,000 square metres, the paper said. "We have invited bids for the project, which will be completed in eight months," it quoted the zone's director, Towfiq Krideya, as saying.

Foreign investment on the rise in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (AP) — Foreign direct investment in Pakistan rose to more than $450 million during the last recorded six month period, a senior government official has said.

According to the latest figures available, direct foreign investment from July 1995 to December 1995 exceeded the previous 12 months' total of about $430 million, said Pakistan Investment Board Secretary Mohib Ullah Shah.

"Despite the difficulties faced by our country, direct investment is continuously rising," Mr. Shah told reporters.

Pakistan's industrial capital, Karachi, has been rocked by ongoing ethnic violence, affecting businesses and investors.

Mr. Shah said incentives had helped to overcome the ethnic strife and attract foreign investment.

Pakistan has been experimenting with various forms of special investment zones to increase the level of foreign investment in key sectors, including electronics and software development.

"We would like to see Pakistan develop into a regional hub for investment," Mr. Shah said.

Pakistan will host a special World Economic Forum conference on Central and South Asian investment opportunities and development next year, he said.

The move will help position Pakistan as a lead player in coordinating and attracting investment.

"This is the first time the World Economic Forum will hold a summit on South Asia and Central Asia. This is a great opportunity for exposure," he said.

More than 500 business executives from around the world are expected to attend next year's conference.

Meanwhile, monetary reforms approved by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) will help boost Pakistan's economic growth to six per cent this year, a senior economic adviser has said.

In addition, the nation's inflation rate should drop from 15 per cent to 10 per cent over the coming months, said V.A. Jaffrey, the chief economic advisor to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.

"We're now starting to see the results of the reforms," Mr. Jaffrey told Associated Press.

Following a review of Pakistan's economic performance, an IMF delegation visiting the capital, Islamabad, recommended a $80 million loan for Pakistan.

The money is the second instalment of a $600 million loan approved by the IMF in December, contingent on efforts to reduce inflation and increase growth.

"Economic growth prospects appear very favourable, inflation has already began to decline, and international reserves have recovered," an IMF delegate to Pakistan, Mohammad Al Erian, said in a statement.

The IMF money will be used to boost Pakistan's balance of payments record, Mr. Al Erian said.

Pakistan has used about 52 per cent of its IMF loan quota of $1.2 billion, Mr. Jaffrey said.

THE BETTER HALF By Glasbergen

"I plan to retire from marriage at age 65. I thought you knew that!"

JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

GYROL

FEROC

YALDDE

RATHEH

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Print answer here:

(Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: KETCH SHEEP ADAGIO SHEKEL
Answer: How ice cream sells during a summer picnic — LIKE "HOT" CAKES

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1996

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Your mind is working cleverly today and you know what should be done to become more successful in your undertakings.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Try to gain whatever data you need confidentially today and then later tonight use it wisely to gain your finest aims for your success.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Plan early today how to gain your greatest ambitions and then go after them in a positive way. A compliment works wonders.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Do as much public activities this morning as you can and gain added prestige, success and profit later this evening as well.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) This is a good day today to take those chances you have in mind, but don't just start and then get cold feet for good results.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Be more concerned with the big issues today instead of concentrating on the details so much of any enterprise you are involved.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) You can today view your partners from a different and better angle at this time and come to a fine understanding with them.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Be enthusiastic about accomplishing a good deal today and you can do just that and efficiently, also. Channel energies constructively.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Put dull duties aside and go after what is important in the business world and gain your aims. Also, have a good time.

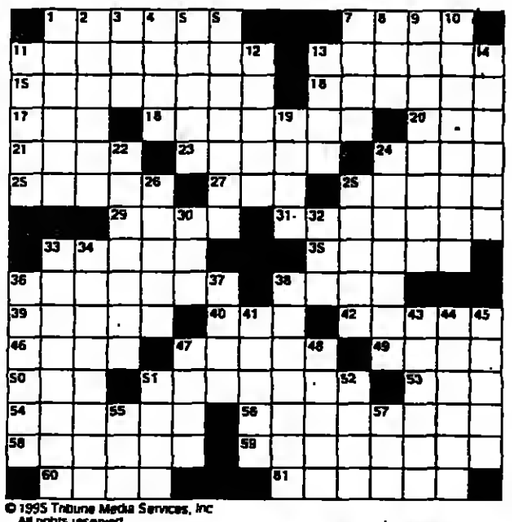
CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) If you use the right words at this time, you can easily get your family to do what you wish. Study your home for needed repairs.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) This is a good day today to see as many persons as you can, whether for business or personal purposes and get good results.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Think over what you can do to have more success later this evening so that you need not worry about finances or monetary obligations.

Birthstone of February: Amethyst — Onyx.

THE Daily Crossword by James Barrick



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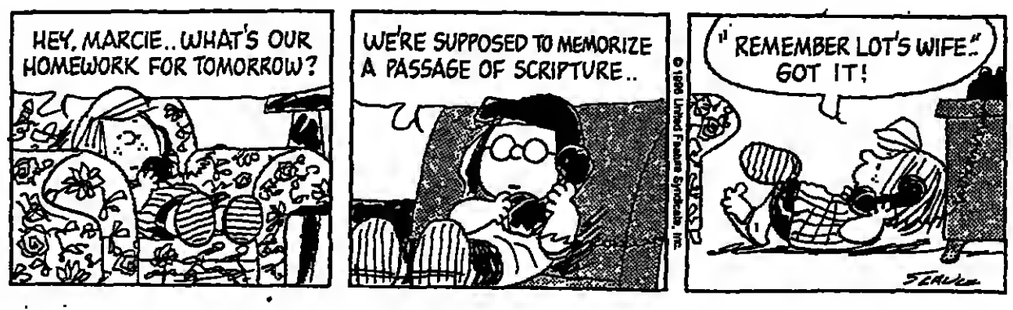
ACROSS
1 Building stone
7 Skidded
11 Make thoroughly wet
13 Keyless, in music
15 Furthered
16 Florentine painter
17 Edge
18 Fraternal order member
20 Sunbeam
21 Indigo
23 Stage direction
24 Havana's island
25 Implied but unsaid
27 "Do — say..."
28 Military award
29 Anthracite
31 Elsa, for one
33 Not hidden
35 — Dame
36 Pressman
38 Neighbor of Braz.
39 Salon solution
40 Scull
42 Turn inside out
46 Arch
47 Zenana
49 Unmatched thing
50 — Ben
51 Ennui
53 J.F.K.'s predecessor
54 Paint
56 Subtle points
58 Unusual thing
59 Accomplishes
60 Lovett or Waggoner
61 Kind of bicycle

DOWN
1 Docking area
2 Kind of energy
3 Liquor from molasses
4 Male siblings: abbr.
5 Turner's machine
6 Everlasting
7 Commotion
8 Old card game
9 Uninvited one
10 Collection of information
11 Jack in a rhyme
12 Redacts
13 Ripening factor
14 Faithful followers
19 Young or Armstrong
22 Freedom
24 Brazilian coin
26 Rich cake
28 Mary or Marianne
30 Had a bite
32 — quandary
33 Not copied
34 Sour
36 Investigator
37 Cry of a wild animal
38 Foretett
41 Place of contest
43 Salad plant
44 Rescue from sin
45 Long lock
47 Sacred
48 Coffee variety
51 — noire
52 Chicken chow —
55 Armed forces: abbr.
57 Actor Danson

Puzzle solved:

Peanuts



Andy Capp

Mutt'n'Jeff

Egypt plans to privatise 72 businesses and banks

CAIRO (AFP) — The Egyptian government announced that it will privatise a wide range of hotels, stores and banks in another step towards economic liberalisation, an official has said.

"The cabinet has decided to sell 72 businesses," Information Minister Safwat Al Sherif said in a statement.

"Fourteen food and home-appliances will be completely privatised, while the rest will be partially privatised," he added.

The government also decided to sell 36 hotels, including nine floating ones, but excluded the privatisation of "a few hotels having an historic and architectural value" such as Mena House near the Pyramids, the Marriot and the Manial Palace at the centre of Cairo and the Cataract at Aswan.

Others excluded from the sale are the Winter Palace in Luxor and the Hotel Palestine in Alexandria.

The large department stores, such as the famous Omar Effendi, nationalised by former President Gamal Abdul Nasser, will be completely privatised," Mr. Sherif said.

The value of shares in the various businesses and banks will be determined over the next two to three months

The government controls 314 businesses, and only 24 have been privatised since plans to liberalise the Egyptain economy were launched in 1991, Mr. Sherif said.

He said the goal of the privatisation was to unload the debt held by public companies "which constitute a burden on the government's budget."

The capital of the 290 companies still under state control is estimated at 88 billion Egyptian pounds ($25.8 billion), but their debts have reached 71 billion pounds [$20.8 billion].

The announced privatisation plans comes two weeks before meetings in Cairo between Egypt and the International Munetary Fund (IMF), which has been pushing Egyptian officials to speed up economic liberalisation in return for forgiving the last slice of development loans estimated at $4 billion.

Egyptian Finance Minister Mohieddine El Gharib said last week that an accord would be signed at the Cairo meeting with the IMF to write off the debt.

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET
HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHMEISANI
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 17/02/1996

COMPANY'S NAME	NO. OF SHARES TRADED	VALUE TRADED JD	PREV. CLOSING PRICE	CLOSING PRICE
ARAB BANK PLC	260	65380	234.000	233.500
JORDAN NATIONAL BANK	600	2626	4.370	4.360
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BANK	900	2104	2.640	2.630
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BANK/NEW	660	1648	2.540	2.530
THE HOUSING BANK	1600	8030	4.970	5.020
JORDAN KUWAIT BANK	375	1034	2.780	2.760
JORDAN GULF BANK	5010	51062	1.020	1.010
JORDAN ISLAMIC BANK	5508	21062	3.020	3.020
BUSINESS BANK	12500	39375	3.150	3.150
JORDAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE BANK	300	1020	3.400	3.400
ARAB BANK FOR INVESTMENT	92850	71066	.800	.760
PHILADELPHIA INVESTMENT BANK.	5000	7247	1.390	1.270
BANKS SECTOR	171498	273349	INDEX NUMBER: CHANGE	185.65 : -0.18%
JORDAN FRENCH INSURANCE	2050	5740	2.800	2.600
INSURANCE SECTOR	2050	5740	INDEX NUMBER: CHANGE	179.23 : 0.00%
JORDANIAN ELECTRIC POWER	1450	2538	1.740	1.750
NATIONAL PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	2300	3558	1.560	1.520
UNITED MIDDLE EAST & COMMODORE HOTELS	1000	2100	2.120	2.100
ARAB INTER. FOR INVESTMENT & EDUCATION	350	1211	3.450	3.460
ZARQA PRIVATE UNIVERSITY	1150	1323	1.150	1.150
UNITED CO. FOR ORGANIZING LAND TRANS.	2950	8482	2.220	2.160
SERVICES SECTOR	10200	19205	INDEX NUMBER: CHANGE	125.21 : -0.24%
THE JORDAN CEMENT FACTORIES	2347	8527	3.660	3.630
THE ARAB POTASH	350	2030	5.800	5.800
JORDAN PETROLEUM REFINERY	220	2185	9.930	9.930
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL MANUFACTURING	2650	11844	4.440	4.470
JORDAN DAIRY	3000	7260	2.420	2.420
THE JORDAN PIPES MANUFACTURING	10000	21600	2.200	2.160
DAR AL DARA DEVELOPMENT & INVESTMENT	480	3432	7.160	7.100
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	4500	2285	.530	.530
ARAB PAPER CONVERTING & TRADING	3000	4230	1.420	1.410
NATIONAL INDUSTRIES	1000	970	.980	.970
INTERMEDIATE PETRO-CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES	2500	3335	1.380	1.330
ARAB CENTER FOR PHARM. & CHEMICALS	150	237	1.600	1.580
KANTHER INVESTMENT	500	750	1.500	1.500
JORDAN INDUSTRIAL RESOURCES CO.	3000	3655	1.830	1.830
JORDAN NEW CABLE COMPANY	5000	6350	1.280	1.270
EL-ZAY READY WEAR MANUFACTURING CO.	11968	27672	2.230	2.220
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR	49668	106442	INDEX NUMBER: CHANGE	124.10 : -0.16%
GRAND TOTAL	233413	403736	INDEX NUMBER: CHANGE	154.93 : -0.17%
NO. OF TRADED SHARES IN PARALLEL MARKET	:	106046		
VALUE TRADED IN PARALLEL MARKET	:	80187		

Reforms put pressure on Saudi private sector

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Reforms launched by Saudi Arabia to minimise damage caused by weak oil prices have started to put pressure on the private sector after years of lavish state spending, a bank study has said.

Saudi Arabia, the reservoir of a quarter of the world's oil, has slashed spending and hiked services fees within the reforms that have also followed an erosion in its overseas funds due to huge payments for the Gulf war.

"The private sector has started to feel the effects of the government policy to rationalise expenditure," said Henry Azzam, chief economist at the National Commercial Bank, the biggest bank in Saudi Arabia.

"There is also a decline in growth in domestic demand due to an increase in prices of imports because of a drop in the rate of the riyal and the U.S. dollar against major currencies as well as an increase in petrol prices and fees on services provided by the government to the private sector."

With a slowdown in the private sector and expectations of lower oil prices in 1996, the Saudi economy is forecast to retreat this year, Mr. Azzam said in his study, published in the United Arab Emirates daily Al Khaleej.

He gave no figures for the total gross domestic product (GDP) but said the non-oil sector was projected to grow by only 1.6 per cent.

Official figures showed the Saudi GDP grew by 4.3 per cent in 1995 due to a 9.2 per cent rise in the oil sector after crude prices increased to around $16.8 from $15.5 in 1994. The 1995 growth was nearly tripple the 1994 rate while it recorded a negative rate of 3.9 per cent in 1993.

Oil provides the bulk of Saudi Arabia's income and the decline in prices over the past decade has created a persistent deficit in its budget.

This forced it to slash spending to nearly $40 billion in 1995 and 1996 from $52 billion in 1993 and as high as $70 billion in 1991. The deficit was cut to $4.9 billion from $33.6 billion in 1991.

Mr. Azzam said the growth over the past years was nominal as inflation has not been calculated. Inflation surged to nearly five per cent in 1995 from only 0.6 per cent in 1994 due to the bikes in services rates as part of the refurms.

"Some activities of the private sector will remain stagnant this year but other fields will maintain positive growth rates. They include the petrochemical sector, mining, communication and electricity," Mr. Azzam said.

"In general, the GDP will recede in 1996 compared with its level last year. But the indicator of the cost of living (inflation) will decline to around one per cent as the budget for this year did not include any price rises," he added.

Mr. Azzam's figures showed the improvement in oil prices boosted Saudi Arabia's trade surplus to $23.3 billion in 1995 from $20.5 billion in 1994. This slashed the deficit in the current account to around $5 billion from $9 billion while the balance of payments was estimated to have recorded a surplus of $2 billion compared with $1.5 billion in the same period, he said.

"This helped the kingdom to support its international financial reserves, which stood at $9.4 billion in October compared with $7.4 billion at the end of 1994. They are now the highest since 1991," he concluded.

Quake finance woes cause Japan bankruptcy record

TOKYO (R) — Total debts of bankrupt Japanese companies surged to their highest level ever in 1995, a result of the devastating Kobe earthquake and a string of financial sector failures, a private research company has said.

Total debts were up 64.1 per cent to 9.24 trillion yen ($87.1 billion) and the number of bankruptcies climbed to 15,108, the highest level since 1986, Tokyo Commerce and Industry Research Co (TSR) said.

Bankruptcies in nearly all industrial sectors rose in 1995 from the year before, with debts highest in the financial sector.

The leap was caused first by the earthquake in January that devastated the major port city of Kobe in western Japan.

That was followed by the failures of Hyogo Bank and Kizu Credit Union, which were Japan's 13th and 15th largest postwar bankruptcies and triggered financial problems for many related companies.

The two financial institutions had sufferd from huge unrecoverable loans after the bursting of Japan's bubble economy of inflated asset prices of the late 1980s. Kizu was Japan's largest credit union in terms of deposits.

Another round of problems was triggered by the failure in August of Nishiki Finance Co, which brought down a number of related companies.

Nishiki Finance had lent short-term funds to small firms, taking promissory notes as collateral, and suffered when the slump in the Japanese economy that began in the early 1990s forced many of its clients into bankruptcy. About 554 companies suffered damage from Nishiki Finance's problems, TSR said.

A high yen, tight-fisted consumer spending and other problems had contributed to the rise in bankruptcies, it said.

The yen hit a record high of 79.75 yen to the dollar on April 19, 1995, before gradually declining to its current level of around 105 yen.

Bankrupt companies are defined as those that are insolvent and in the process of liquidation or reorganisation under court protection from creditors.

During 1995, the number of large businesses with debts of more than one billion yen ($9.4 million) which went bankrupt totalled 752, up from 722 the previous year. The number of bankrupt firms with debts over 10 billion yen ($94.3 million) climbed to 88 from 65.

Small and medium-sized businesses were likely to suffer further in the months to come, TSR said, as many had relied on orders from large corporations, which had been restructuring and moving their production faeilities overseas.

BUSINESS

A review of news from the Arabic press

Unified Company for Organising Land Transport to distribute 11% in dividends

☆☆ THE GENERAL assembly of the Unified Company for the Organisation of Land Transport has approved the distribution of 11 per cent in dividends to shareholders. The company achieved JD 1.37 million in net profit, an amount that represents 27.5 per cent of the company's paid-up capital. Net profit in 1995 stood at 7.5 per cent up from JD 1.28 million in 1994. The company transported 5.5 million tonnes of various goods and collected JD 45.5 million in charges, JD 41.0 million of which from transporting goods inside the Kingdom. Goods transported outside the country amounted to 658,271 tonnes. As a result of its operations, the company earned a total of JD 1.45 million last year compared to JD 1.36 million in 1994. Other figures show the company's total investments increased from JD 219,600 in 1994 to JD 867,000 in 1995.

According to Dureid Mahasneh, the chairman of the board, the company has won a JD 17 million tender from the Ministry of Supply to transport foodstuffs throughout the country and made a contract with Al Naber transport company to transport phosphate. Mr. Mahasneh said the company eyes getting the tenders for transporting salt and cement. He said negotiations were under way between the company and the authorities to establish a truck depot in Aqaba. Other negotiations are under way for investment in a "truck terminal" in the Amman area. Mr. Mahasneh explained that the company would direct its activities in the future towards setting up an overland transport terminals for trucks and goods near Amman and on the bridges with the Palestinian territories. It (the company) would coordinate with ports and commercial centres capable of dealing with containers in terms of loading and unloading, he said. Towards this aim, he pointed out, a 2,500-dunum plot of land near Amman has been specified for the "truck terminal" project. The terminals need JD 15 million investment that can be raised to JD 25 million, the company's chairman indicated noting that the projects would make Jordan a regional centre for the transport of goods and for transit and would proivde many new employment opportunities (Al Ra'i + Al Dustour + Al Aswaq).

Vehicles Owners Federation Company to distribute 35% in dividends

☆☆ THE GENERAL assembly of the Vehicles Owners Federatioo Company has approved the distribution of 35 per cent in dividends to shareholders as the company posted a JD 309,200 net profit in 1995. The company made a JD 240,700 profit from its JD 1.3 million investment in the Unified Company for the Organisation of Land Transport. The Vehicles Owners Federation Company (VOFC) bought 70,985 shares of the Unified Company and, as a result, raised its investment to JD 1.4 million. The VOFC has investments totalling JD 1.66 million. At market value the investments are worth JD 3.2 million spread among the Islamic Bank, the Islamic Insurance, Al Amin Investment and the Unified Company. VOFC's earnings in 1995 totalled JD 526,900 compared to JD 494,500 and net profit increased from JD 247,100 to JD 309,200. Total assets grew from JD 2.54 million in 1994 to JD 3.01 million in 1995 (Al Aswaq).

Financial Markets — Jordan Times in co-operation with Cairo Amman Bank

U.S. Dollar in International Markets

Currency	New York Close Date 15/2/96	New York Close Date 16/2/96
Sterling Pound*	1.5375	1.5525
Deutsche Mark	1.4605	1.4545
Swiss Franc	1.1975	1.1945
French Franc	5.0545	5.0065
Japanese Yen	105.55	105.15
European Currency Unit	1.2490	1.2415

* USD per STG
** European Opening on 1:00 a.m. GMT

Eurocurrency Interest Rates — Date: 17/2/1996

Currency	1 MTH	3 MTHS	6 MTHS	12 MTHS
U.S. Dollar	5.06	5.00	4.85	4.75
Sterling Pound	6.00	5.93	5.87	5.86
Deutsche Mark	3.06	3.00	3.00	3.06
Swiss Franc	1.25	1.37	1.43	1.68
French Franc	3.81	3.87	3.93	4.00
Japanese Yen	0.25	0.31	0.37	0.43
European Currency Unit	4.65	4.59	4.56	4.56

Interbank bid rates for amounts exceeding U.S. Dollars 1,000,000 or equivalent.

Central Bank of Jordan Exchange Rate Bulletin — Date: 17/2/1996

Currency	Bid	Offer
U.S. Dollar	0.7050	0.7120
Sterling Pound	1.0980	1.1055
Deutsche Mark	0.4865	0.4917
Swiss Franc	0.5971	0.6001
French Franc	0.1413	0.1420
Japanese Yen*	0.6727	0.6760
Dutch Guilder	0.4547	0.4569
Swedish Krona	------	------
Italian Lira*	0.0446	0.0448
Belgian Franc	------	------

* Per 100

Other Currencies — Date: 17/2/1996

Currency	Bid	Offer
Bahraini Dinar	1.8620	1.8730
Lebanese Lira*	0.04355	0.04465
Saudi Riyal	0.1870	0.1895
Kuwaiti Dinar	2.3070	2.3570
Qatari Riyal	0.1932	0.1955
Egyptian Pound	0.2000	0.2100
Omani Riyal	1.8330	1.8470
UAE Dirham	0.1922	0.1955
Greek Drachma*	0.2825	0.3145
Cypriot Pound	1.4865	1.5460

* Per 100

JORDAN MARKETPLACE

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JORDAN MARKET PLACE

Kasparov beats computer, takes lead

PHILADELPHIA (AFP) — Computers may be whizzes at chess but they still have some things to learn. IBM's "Deep Blue" picked up a valuable lesson Friday: When the world champion offers a draw, take it.

Garry Kasparov got a second wind after his offer to settle for a draw was rebuffed by the IBM team, and he went on to beat their supercomputer and take a lead in their six-match series with a game left.

"Deep Blue," resigned in its 48th move to give the 32-year-old Kasparov a two games to one edge with two draws as they head into the finale on Saturday.

"Today was a good day," Kasparov was quoted as saying in an account of the match carried on the internet. "I proved this machine is not invincible."

The world champion, who suffered a shock defeat in the opening game of the series, will have advantage of playing the white pieces as he seeks to clinch the $100,000 first prize with a win or a draw.

Kasparov appeared to take a slight edge in the match Friday but offered a draw when it seemed he had little chance to parlay his advantage into a win, according to international master David Levy.

The Russian was also running into time problems for the match, in which players have to complete 40 moves within the first two hours. Kasparov had less than 25 minutes left to make 11 moves, "Deep Blue" had 80 minutes.

But the IBM team, led by Chung-Jen Tan, refused the draw and said they wanted to see how their supercomputer would react.

Big mistake.

Kasparov soon rapidly improved his position amid what experts called some sloppy maneouvers by the computer, which was playing white. By the 37th move, when Kasparov captured a bishop, "Deep Blue's" fate looked sealed.

Levy told AFP that the IBM technicians gambled on the draw offer because "they figured their losing chances were very remote. They thought they stood to lose very little by carrying on.

"But they got to the point where Kasparov tied the programme up a little, and from there it was downhill," he said.

Kasparov was sitting in the driver's seat after enduring newspaper headlines that had proclaimed the victory of machine over man in his opening-match loss.

His opponent was a 32-node IBM SP high performance computer based in the New York City suburb of Yorktown Heights. Its system is capable of calculating 50 billion to 100 billion moves within three minutes.

Kasparov is no stranger to playing with computers. A device eliminated Kasparov in 1994 from 25-minute Grand Prix play in London, and he lost earlier that year in a five-minute "blitz" contest in Germany.

But the six-game faceoff against "Deep Blue" was the first contest held under classical chess rules which give the player's more time to analyse their moves.

Kasparov had said prior to the first game that no computer — no matter how powerful — could beat him in a regulation chess match.

The series here was organised by the Association for Computing Machinery, an 85,000-member international group dedicated to advancing information technology.

It was staged to mark the 50th birthday of the computer. While the winner gets $400,000, the loser will receive $100,000.

World Chess Champion Garry Kasparov contemplates his next move during his sixth chess match against IBM's Deep Blue (Reuters photo)

Sampras, Agassi near showdown

SAN JOSE (R) — Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi took another step toward a finals showdown when the two Americans won their quarterfinal matches in the $28,000 Sybase Open on Friday.

The second seeded Agassi had to struggle through a 7-6 (7-3), 6-4 victory over veteran Richey Reneberg. The two expert returner played each other tough on service games. Agassi broke Reneberg four times and Reneberg broke the World No. 3 three times.

"Richey is an extraordinary doubles player who serves well, moves well, returns well, volleys well and has real good hands," Agassi said.

But Agassi said he never really felt threatened.

"I felt in control," Agassi said. "Richey never sticks the ball quite the way he should. If he's on the defensive, he stays on the defensive."

Agassi's opponent in the semifinal will be Michael Chang, who blitzed Australian Jason Stoltenberg 6-1, 6-0.

In the semifinals of last month's Australian Open, Chang crushed an exhausted Agassi in straight sets. Agassi said Chang, whom he beat in the final of this tournament last year, is an improved player.

"Michael is a clear example of someone who every year adds seven per cent to his game and does whatever is necessary to stay even with the top guys," Agassi said.

Sampras, the top seed here, also had to struggle for a 6-7 (7-5) 6-3, 6-4 victory over No. 7 seed Greg Rusedski of Britain.

The left-handed Briton nearly upended the three-time Wimbledon champion, serving, volleying and chipping Sampras into frustration in the first set and a half.

"I wasn't playing that bad, but Greg was taking the initiative and being the aggressive one," Sampras said. "I was a little confused about what I was supposed to be doing out there... Greg's a crafty player. He serves real big, he doesn't give you a lot of rhythm."

In the second set, Sampras finally caught up to Rusedskis bullet serve with a twist and found the range on his passing shots.

Sampras broke Rusedski in the eighth game after punching back a first serve and then crushing a Rusedski volley for a crosscourt backhand winner. Sampras served out the set with ease.

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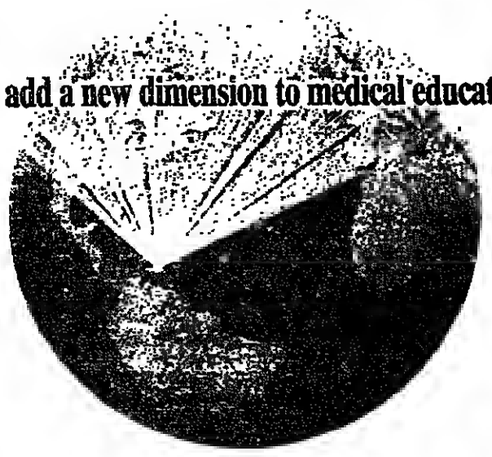

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SPOT THE ERRORS

Both vulnerable. South deals.

NORTH
♠ 9 6 5 2
♡ 10 9 8 3
♢ A K J 6
♣ 10

WEST
♠ Q 8 4
♡ A J 5
♢ 8 3
♣ K J 9 4 2

EAST
♠ K J 7
♡ 4
♢ 10 9 7 4 2
♣ 8 7 6 3

SOUTH
♠ A 10 3
♡ K Q 8 7 2
♢ Q 5
♣ A Q 5

The bidding:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1♡	Pass	4♡	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Opening lead: Four of ♠

Study the bidding and play of this hand. Decide if any errors were committed and, if so, by who.

There are those who might criticize North's jump to four hearts. While it is a trifle aggressive, the possibility of a vulnerable game should stir any red-blooded soul into action.

West led a low spade and East's king lost to the ace. Declarer decided that it would be a good idea to discard spade losers on the diamonds. West ruffed the third diamond and found the excellent return of a low spade, taken by East's jack. A diamond continuation now impaled declarer on the horns of a dilemma. If South ruffed low, West would overruff to complete the defensive book. The trump ace would be the setting trick.

At the table declarer chose to ruff with the queen of trumps. West countered elegantly by discarding rather than overruffing, and had to collect two trump tricks for down one.

What's your verdict?

We would have preferred to have East make the discovery play of the jack of spades at trick one — West certainly wasn't underleading the ace of spades on this auction. The serious charge, however, belongs to declarer. A simple one-round hold-up play of the ace of spades would have saved the contract.

West can still get to ruff a diamond as declarer discards a spade, but now there's no entry to the East hand for the trump promotion. The defenders will score only one spade trick, one heart and one ruff.

Malaysia to stage big cycling race

KUALA LUMPUR (R) — Malaysia will hold Asia's biggest cycling event, a tour around peninsular Malaysia offering $400,000 in prize money, organisers said on Saturday.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad will flag off Le Tour de Langkawi on February 29 on the Northern Island of Langkawi and the race will end 10 days later on the Island after travelling through major towns on the peninsula.

The race has attracted 21 teams from 19 countries so far, although none of the world's top cyclists have entered due to scheduling conflicts, the organisers said.

Brian Elliot, head of race consultants sports Ambassador Limited, told a news conference the concept of a country tour race in Asia was a great boost for world cycling.

"The opportunity for top cyclists to escape the fierce Europe winter and warm up for the cycling season in Asia has exciting potential," he said.

Salim Yatim, chief executive of the race's organising company, said 25 private sector sponsors have contributed 3.5 million ringgit ($1.37 million) in cash and kind for the race.

He said special events were being organised in many towns to coincide with the 11-stage finishes of the tour.

Le Tour De Langkawi willbe an annual event and will feature prominently in the international federation for cyclists calendar, Salim said.

Hill admits he is favourite

LONDON (AFP) — Britain's Damon Hill said Friday he has a better chance than anyone of winning the Formula One world drivers' championship title this season.

Hill launches his Grand Prix hid in Australia on March 10 aware that double world champion Michael Schumacher and his chief championship rivals all believe he will land his first title.

"It's true I am going into the championship with the best chance of winning," said Hill during testing the new Williams-Renault FW18 in Portugal.

Speaking via a satellite link-up to London from the Estoril circuit, he added: "This is my fourth season with Williams. It's logical to assume this will be my best chance purely because of the experience I have had with the team."

While Hill knows he can draw on his long association with Williams, rival Schumacher and his other main opponents — including new teammate Jacques Villeneuve — must all get used to new surroundings.

Hill was just one point from the title in 1994 but fell short last season as Schumacher dominated the championship.

He added: "I am very pleased with the car so far. It's been very good during testing.

"It's a very good sign if the car is workable and competitive straight from the block.

"The championship will be a tough fight, but we've a good starting point. I know I have the right team and the right equipment."

Court rejects Graf father's bail plea

STUTTGART (R) — The father of tennis player Steffi Graf will remain in investigative custody after a German court rejected his plea for bail in a tax evasion probe into her financial affairs, prosecutors said on Friday.

The high court in the southern city of Karlsruhe rejected Peter Graf's application for bail, saying he was still under strong suspicion of having committed an offence and there was a danger he might try to flee.

Graf, 57, has been in investigative custody in a Mannheim jail since early August as part of the tax probe. Prosecutors have blocked several attempts by his lawyers to get him released on bail.

Press reports say he is accused of not declaring around 40 million marks (about $27 million) of his millionaire daughter's earnings and of withholding millions of marks in taxes.

Steffi Graf, 26, has staunchly defended her father's actions, while attacking the specialists he employed to help to maximise her income. She is under investigation as part of the prohle but prosecutors have so far seen no need to detain her.

It remained unclear if or when federal prosecutors planned to charge Peter Graf officially.

44 injured after Zamalek match

PORT SAID (AFP) — Forty-two police officers and two civilians were injured in clashes that erupted after a football match in this port city on the Suez Canal, police said Saturday.

Most of the injuries were light when the Masri team fans set fire to five vehicles, including a security truck, and threw stones at a television van and other cars, to protest after the referee awarded a penalty to their rivals Zamalek in Friday's match.

Egyptian police threw teargas into the stadium to force people out, but that sparked new clashes, resulting in further injuries, the police official added.

Two police and two civilians remained in the hospital Saturday, but the others were released shortly after being treated.

Bruguera submits to Pioline

MARSEILLE (R) — Sergi Bruguera crashed out of the $539,000 Marseille Open quarter-finals on Friday, losing in three sets to Frenchman Cedric Pioline. The Spanish second seed, playing in his first tournament since he tore knee ligaments in training in December, was far too weak physically for seventh seed Pioline, who won 4-6, 6-3, 6.2. Former French Open winner Bruguera said: "When I saw my strength failing me, I tried to move him around the court. But he was very strong." Pioline, a former U.S. Open finalist, has had a good season so far, reaching the Zagreb final two weeks ago before winning his two Davis cup singles against Denmark.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Iranian player missing in Germany

BERLIN (AFP) — A member Iran's water polo national squad, Morteza Bayat, has gone missing in Berlin during the Olympic qualifying tournament, police said here Friday. Bayat, 23, was last seen by his team mates on Tuesday when they visited a shopping centre together. The player, who also acts as team treasurer, is believed to have around 20,000 marks ($13,000) in cash on him but no identity papers, police said.

Laudrup extends contract

GLASGOW (AFP) — Danish international star Brian Laudrup will be staying at Scottish champions Rangers until the end of 1998 after signing a one-year extension to this contract. "He still has one-and-a-half years to go and that extra year will take him on until nearly 1999," said Rangers manager Walter Smith. "He is delighted to make this commitment to the club and we are delighted to have him. Maybe this will end all the speculation about his future," he added.

Ticket scare for Euro 96 fans

LONDON (AFP) — Fans hunting Euro 96 tickets for England's matches against Scotland and Holland were warned Friday not to hand over cash to private agencies. Some agencies are claiming they have tickets in stock but Euro '96 official Philippa Warhurst said: "That is nonsense. The tickets are not even printed yet. "We would advise people they are taking huge risks handing over money for tickets unless they are dealing with one of the three approved agencies. If people are being offered tickets now, they must be forgeries." A Daily Star reporter claimed he had been offered 25 tickets for the June 15 England-Scotland clash at 275 pounds each by a private agency, who were able to specify exactly where the owners would sit. "In conjunction with the Football Association, we are still looking at security and segregation of fans for this match," Warhurst added. "No seats have been allocated at all yet, so it would be quite impossible for anyone to be informed where they will be sitting."

Red Sox sign MVP

BOSTON (R) — The Boston Red Sox on Friday agreed to a three-year contract with 1995 American League most valuable player Mo Vaughn, avoiding an arbitration hearing with their first baseman. Terms of the deal, which includes an option for the 1999 season, were not disclosed, but various reports claim the first three years are worth $18 million. The 28-year-old Vaughn had an arbitration scheduled for Monday and had said he would become a free agent after the 1997 season if he was forced to sign a one-year deal. The estimated $6 million annual salary would make vaughn one of the highest paid players in baseball. Vaughn beat out Cleveland Indians slugger Albert Belle by eight points in one of the closest MVP votes in history. Vaughn tied for the league lead in RBI with 126 and hit .300 iwth 39 home runs in 1995 as he helped lead the red sox to the American league east title. "Mo is a special part of the Red Sox organisation and the Boston community," said general manager Dan Duquette. "We are counting on him to continue his important contributions of leadership and a powerful bat to our club, as our entire organisation continues its dedicated extensions towards winning a world series championship."

TODAY AT

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CINEMA PLAZA TEL: 699238
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Shows: 12:30, 2:15, 6:45, 8:30, 10:30

CINEMA CONCORD TEL: 677420
CONCORD "1"
On Deadly Ground
Shows: 12:30, 2:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30
CONCORD "2"
* Jim Carrie
Shows: 2:30, 6:15

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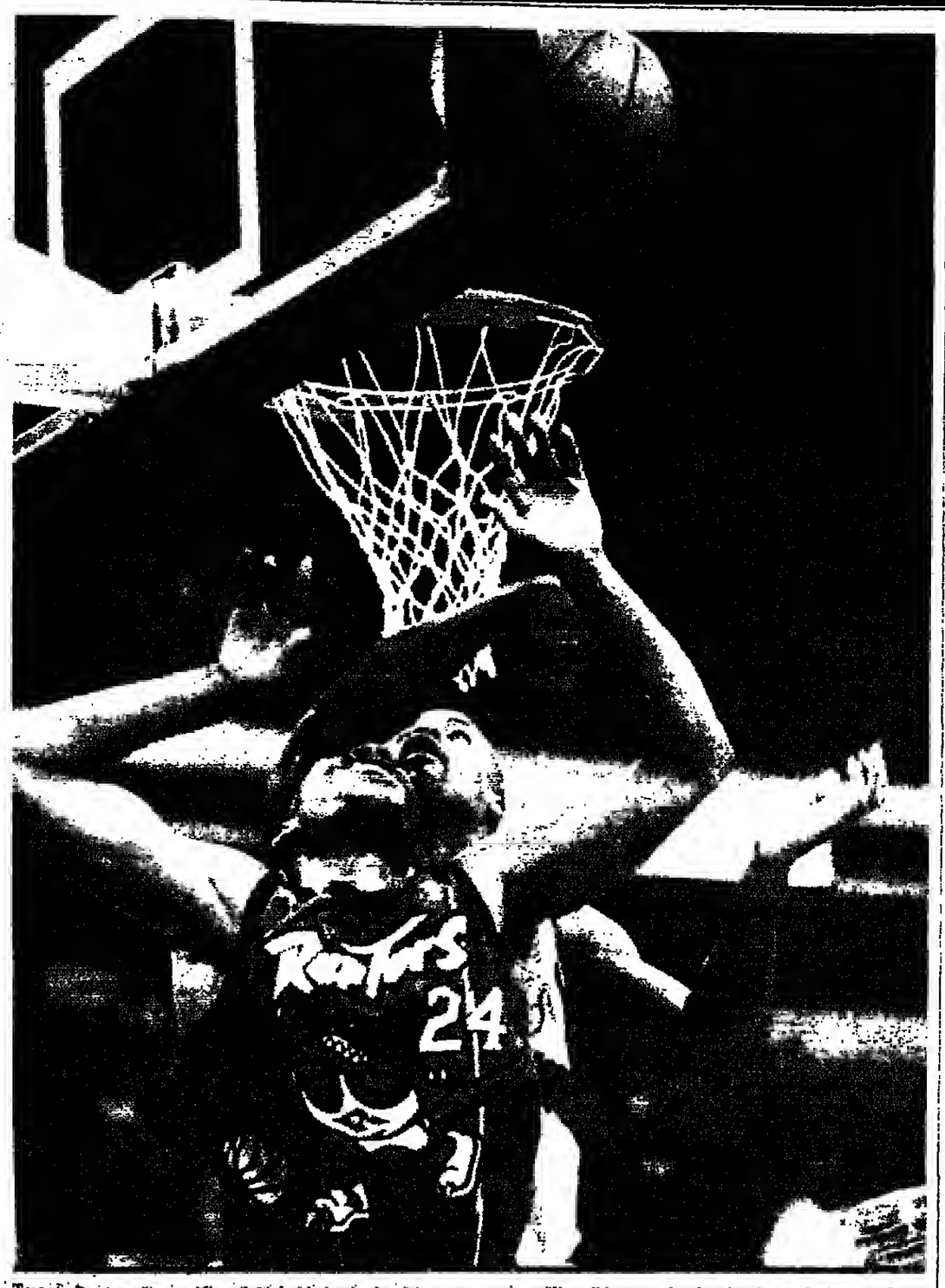

Toronto Raptors Jimmy King (left) is hit in the head by an opponent. King did not make the shot but a foul was called (Reuters photo)

Shaq works his magic on the Bucks

ORLANDO (R) — Shaquille O'Neal scored 19 of his 31 points in the first quarter when the Orlando Magic opened a 15-point lead on the way to a 121-91 rout of the Milwaukee Bucks on Friday.

The Magic matched the record for the best home start in league history at 27-0. The 1946-47 Washington Capitols opened the season with 27 consecutive home wins.

"It's about staking your home turf," said O'Neal. "We feel confident in our building. A team is going to have to play real well to have a chance at beating us here."

In Baltimore, Reggie Miller made one free throw with 1.3 second left to snap a tie as the Indiana Pacers broke a three-game losing streak with a 95-94 victory over the Washington Bullets.

Miller scored 29 points, Rik Smits had 28 points and 10 rebounds and Ricky Pierce had 10 for Indian.

Juwan Howard had 32 points for Washington.

"As a team, we have to find a way to win games like these," Howard said. "We all can score, We've got to play defence."

In Charlotte, Matt Geiger scored 28 points, including 14 in the fourth quarter, to lead the Charlotte Hornets to a 107-100 victory over the Denver Nuggets.

Denver played without all-star centre Dikembe Mutombu, who had a streak of 295 straight starts snapped due to a sprained ankle.

Glen Rice scored 20 of his 26 points in the second half and Larry Johnson had 15 points for the Hornets.

At Minnesota, Steve Kerr's three-pointer with 4:30 to play snapped a tie and Michael Jordan scored 31 points as the Chicago Bulls beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 103-100.

Scottie Pippen added 29 points for Chicago.

Isaiah Rider scored 29 points for the Timberwolves.

In New York, Patrick Ewing and Derek Harper scored 12 points apiece in the first quarter as the New York Knicks raced to a 40-16 lead and cruised to a 116-84 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers.

Harper finished with 21 points and Ewing 18 as. Doug Christie added a season-high 16 for New York.

In San Antonio, David Robinson scored 15 of his 17 points in the first half as the San Antonio Spurs raced to a take a 10-point lead at half-time and go on to a 113-95 victory over the Golden State Warriors.

Robinson added 18 rebounds in 26 minutes, Vinny Del Negro scored 20 points and Charles Smith, making his first start for the Spurs, had 15 points.

Tim Hardaway and Chris Gatling had 18 points for Golden State.

In Los Angeles, Magic Johnson scored 18 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter as the Los Angeles Lakers allied for a 119-114 victory over the Dallas Mavericks.

Johnson had 11 assists and eight rebounds. Cedric Ceballos had 27 points and Nick Van Exel had 22 points for Los Angeles.

Jim Jackson scored 31 points and George McCloud added 29 for Dallas, which has lost three straight.

In Seattle, Detlef Schrempf scored 19 points to lead a balanced attack as the Seattle Supersonics pulled away for a 117-99 victory over the Phoenix Suns.

Hersey Hawkins had 19 points and Gary Payton 18 for the Supersonics.

Charles Barkley had 27 points for Phoenix.

In Vancouver, Stacey Augmon and Mookie Blaylock keyed a decisive third-quarter run as the Atlanta Hawks defeated the Vancuuver Grizzlies 110-100, in the team's first meeting.

Blayluck scored 21 points, Steve Smith 16 and Grant. Long had 15 for Atlanta, which won for just the third time in eight games since a season-best 10-game winning streak.

Bryant Reeves had a career-high 26 points for Vancouver.

In Sacramento, Dino Radja matched a season-high with 31 points and Rookie Eric Williams added a season-high 21 to lead the Boston Celdcs to a 130-102 rout of the Sacramento Kings.

The victory was unly the fourth in 13 games for the Celtics.

STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division	W	L	PCT	GB
Orlando	36	14	.720	—
New York	31	17	.646	4
Miami	23	27	.460	13
Washington	22	27	.449	13½
New Jersey	20	29	.408	15½
Boston	19	31	.380	17
Philadelphia	10	38	.208	25
Central Division				
Chicago	45	5	.900	—
Indiana	32	18	.640	13
Cleveland	28	20	.583	16
Atlanta	27	22	.551	17½
Detroit	24	23	.511	19½
Charlotte	24	25	.490	20½
Milwaukee	19	29	.396	25
Toronto	14	35	.286	30½
WESTERN CONFERENCE				
Midwest Division				
Utah	34	16	.680	—
San Antonio	32	16	.667	1
Houston	33	18	.647	1½
Denver	20	30	.400	14
Dallas	16	33	.327	17½
Minnesota	14	34	.292	19
Vancouver	11	38	.224	22½
Pacific Division				
Seattle	37	12	.755	—
LA Lakers	30	19	.612	7
Sacramento	24	23	.511	12
Portland	24	26	.480	13½
Phoenix	23	26	.469	14
Golden State	23	27	.460	14½
LA Clippers	16	33	.327	21

RESULTS

New York	116	Philadelphia	84
Orlando	121	Milwaukee	91
Indiana	95	Washington	94
Charlotte	107	Denver	100
Chicago	103	Minnesota	100
San Antonio	113	Golden State	95
Seattle	117	Phoenix	99
Atlanta	110	Vanconver	100
LA Lakers	119	Dallas	114
Boston	130	Sacramento	102

Lehtinen doping ban lifted

HELSINKI (R) — Swimmer Petteri Lehtinen is free to compete in the Atlanta Olympics after a sports arbitration court overturned a two-year duping ban imposed on him last June, the Finnish anti-doping ban imposed on him last June, the Finnish anti-doping committee said on Friday. "If the ban had held it would have made a mockery of the system," Timu Seppala, head uf the committee, told Reuters by telephone. Finnish Swimming authorities had rigorously opposed the two-year suspension imposed by the International Swimming Federation (FINA), saying 21-year-old Lehtinen had failed a doping test on a technicality. Lehtinen said he had used a medication containing Salbutamol — a stimulant and anabolic agent permitted only by inhaler to treat asthma but had forgotten to disclose this as required on a routine form after a surprise late-night test. The medication is permitted by the Internatiunal Olympic Committee (IOC), so the international court of arbitration for sport in Lausanne overturned the FINA ban. FINA last july turned down an appeal by the Finns.

Orthodoxi reclaim first division crown

AMMAN (J.T.) — Al Orthodoxi Saturday upset Al Ahli 92-75 to reclaim their first division basketball title which they had last won in 1991.

Al Orthodoxi won the first half 47-36 and went on to expand their lead upsetting the titleholders who settled for second place.

Over 4000 fans attended the match at the Sports Palace (SEE DETAILS TOMORROW).

Iraq determined to qualify for Atlanta Games

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraq's national football coach Anouar Jassem said here on Saturday he was determined to see his team qualify for the Olympic Games in Atlanta.

Jassem said: "Iraq is determined to represent Asia at Atlanta and break the sports embargo that was imposed by America."

FIFA forbade Iraq to host any international home matches after their army invaded neighbouring Kuwait in August 1990.

In June 1993 FIFA relented and said teams would be allowed to play in Iraq but at their "own risk."

Iraq qualified for the second round of Olympic qualifying by winning their initial group comprising Jordan and Qatar.

In March's second round in Malaysia the Iraqis face the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Japan.

Ngugi, Kariuki falter in Kenya

NAIROBI (R) — World cross country champion Paul Tergat retained his title at Kenya's national cross country championships on Saturday, but five times former world champion John Ngugi and his younger brother James Kariuki, were well beaten.

Ngugi, running his first big race in Kenya for three years, was placed 96th. His brother, current leader of the IAAF cross challenge, finished 46th in the 12.002 km race. Their times were not available.

Ngugi, 1988 Seoul Olympics 5,000 metres gold medallist, had said the Nairobi championship was important in assessing his strength before the World Championships in Cape Town next month. But he was never in contention, staying well behind the leaders and making no effort to reach the front.

"I am happy with my performance. My speed is getting better by the day and I am sure if given the opportunity team for South Africa, I will finish among the top three," Ngugi, 31, said.

Ngugi also repeated his intention to switch races gradually to 10,000 metres, half marathon and marathon over a four-year period.

Tergat, timed at 35 minntes 57.00 seconds, said he would have no problem defending the world title: "I am only rioting for Olympic games. Defending the world title is a foregone conclusion," he said.

Winners at Kenya's national cross country championships have traditionality gone on to win the global title in recent years.

Kiptum Muigei was second in 36:07.66 and Josphat Machnka third in 36:13.13.

Majoli struggles, Huber out of Paris Indoor Open

PARIS (AFP) — Iva Majoli of Croatia, top-seeded in a major tournament for the first time in her career, very nearly made her first and last appearance at this year's Paris Indoor Open on Friday.

The 18-year-old, who has risen to fourth in the rankings following her victory in Tokyo two weeks ago where her victims included Australian Open champion Monica Seles, needed to go the distance to beat plucky French teenage qualifier Nathalie Dechy 4-6, 6-4, 6-1.

It was Majoli's first singles clash of the tournament. She had a bye in the first-round and then beat Sandrine Testud by a walkover when the French player had to withdraw in the second-round because of injury.

Majoli, who had been suffering from "flu all week, now plays third-seed Magdalena Maleeva of Bulgaria for a place in Sunday's final.

The other semi-final will be between France's Julie Halard-Decugis and Silvia Farina of Italy.

Dechy, the 1994 Orange Bowl champion, is currently a modest 215th in the world but is expected to move up around 100 places in next week's rankings after her remarkable week in Paris — during which she defeated the 1994 Wimbledon semi-finalist Lori McNeil and then put out senior compatriot Nathalie Tauziat.

Against Majoli, the Guadeloupe-born player gave as good as she got for a set and a half and was leading 3-1 in the second set before running out of steam.

But if there was disappointment among the home supporters inside the Coubertin Stadium over Dechy's defeat, they had plenty to cheer when Julie Halard-Decugis, a finalist against Martina Navratilova two years ago, notched up a thrilling three-set victory over second-seeded Anke Huber.

The 25-year-old French player, who posted her current good form by winning Hobart last month, clinched a 6-3, 2-6, 7-6 (10-8) win. It was a close-run thing.

Huber, warned for racket abuse after going 3-5 behind in the final set, saved seven match points in the next game.

The fifth-ranked German player, bidding to reach her third consecutive final after being runner-up to Monica Seles at the Australian Open and finalist against compatriot Steffi Graf at the 1995 WTA Championships, admitted afterwards: "I lost concentration. I thought I had it won when I led 3-1 in the second-set."

Although Huber saved another three match points in the tie-break, she finally surrendered after 2 hours 15 minutes.

Third-seed Manuela Maleeva impressively outplayed Miriam Oremans in straight-sets.

The 20-year-old Bulgarian, who spends most of her spare time between matches and training reading classical literature, chalked up a 6-3, 6-4 victory. She has now dropped only 10 games since the tournament began.

Maleeva stripped away the Dutch player's hopes with some blistering returns and a purple patch of serviog in the first set.

The 23-year-old Oremans fought hard in the final games but she was clearly feeling the effects of winning the week's longest match 24 hours earlier when she took three and a quarter hours to beat Judith Wiesner of Austria 6-7 (5-7), 7-6 (7-2), 7-6 (7-3).

Silvia Farina also reached the last four with a straight-sets win which took just 65 minutes. She defeated Petra Begerow of Germany 6-3, 6-1.

Begerow, who put France's fourth-seeded Mary Pierce out of the event in the second-round, played with her left thigh heavily strapped.

She never recovered after making a poor start in both sets — trailing 0-3 in the first and 0-4 in the second.

Earlier the WTA confirmed that Jennifer Capriati has officially accepted a wild-card entry for next week's event in Essen.

The 20-year-old American, who had to postpone her much publicised return to the game in the Paris event on Tuesday when she strained a muscle in her lower back during training, is still undergoing treatment. She has been visiting the stadium and watching matches daily and is hopeful she can be fit for Germany.

The world's sixth-ranked player until she turned her back on the game after a first-round defeat at the 1993 United States Open, Capriati has not played competitive tennis since her first short-lived comeback attempt in November 1994. On that occasion she was beaten in the first round in Philadelphia by Anke Huber.

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Shbeilat appears heading for landslide victory in JEA elections

By Saeda Kilani
Special to The Jordan Times

AMMAN — Leith Shbeilat, the incumbent president of the Jordan Engineers Association (JEA) currently being held and tried for lese majeste, last night appeared to be heading for a landslide victory over his three rivals for the JEA presidency.

Early results of the elections showed Mr. Shbeilat well ahead of contenders Abdul Fatah Tongar, Hany Ta'ani and Hassan Hawamdeh.

Mr. Shbeilat, who if convicted of the slander charges would face up to three years in prison, and is an opponent of peace with Israel and normalisation of relations with the Jewish state.

Islamist candidates Husni Abu Gaida was likely to win the JEA vice-president seat against Abdul Rahman Bitar of the nationalists bloc.

Of the seven seats reserved for council members, five were expected to go to Islamists.

Only 5,528 engineers of 12,680 registered and eligible voters turned out for Friday and Saturday elections. The JEA has more than 30,000 members.

The first result of the elections will be announced today.

IRA says it planted bomb which was defused in heart of London

LONDON (R) — The Irish Republican Army (IRA) said on Saturday that it did plant a second bomb in London within a week of abandoning its 17-month-long ceasefire.

In a telephone call to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the IRA said it was responsible for a device found in a telephone box in the heart of London's theatreland on Thursday.

That was later defused by police.

Police defused the bomb and sealed off a vast area around Shafteshury Avenue, bringing chaos to the capital.

The IRA dramatically ended its truce less than a week earlier by exploding a bomb in the Docklands commercial area in east London, killing two people and injuring more than 100.

Police made about 30 arrests on Friday but said on Saturday that the suspects had all been ruled out of any involvement in the bombing.

The IRA, which fought for more than 25 years to end Britisb rule in Northern Ireland, accuse the British government of stalling the start of full-scale peace talks aimed at finding a political settlement.

An anonymous donor has offered a one million pound ($1.54 million) reward for information leading to the arrest of the bombers.

Police said they hoped the vast sum might tempt criminals or IRA supporters to break the code of silence which normally surrounds guerrilla operations.

Gerry Adams, leader of Sinn Fein, the IRA's political arm, had two hours of talks with Irish government officials on Friday but said they had not left him optimistic about restarting the peace process.

The London and Dublin governments have said they will not talk again to Sinn Fein at ministerial level until the IRA renews its ceasefire and promises it will be permanent.

British Prime Minister John Major and Irisb Prime Minister John Bruton are expected to meet next week to seek a way forward.

U.N. envoy says Tehran cooperating with probe into human rights situation

GENEVA (R) — United Nations envoy Maurice Copithorne, back from a six-day visit to Tehran, said on Saturday he felt the Iranian government wanted to cooperate with his probe into the country's human rights situation.

Mr. Copithorne, a Canadian law professor, also told a news conference he had no sense that the Iranian authorities bad prevented people from seeing him. Several bundreds had tried to seek him ont, he added.

"It is my feeling that they (the Iranian authorities) genuinely want to cooperate with this exercise....even though they feel it is unfair that they have been singled ont for this treatment," Mr. Copithorne said.

The former top Canadian diplomat was appointed special representative for Iran last year by the U.N. human rights commission after his predecessor, Reginaldo Galindo Pohl of El Salvador, resigned.

Mr. Galindo Pohl was allowed by the Iranian government to make three visits from 1989-91. Bnt after his reports formed the basis for condemnation of Iran's rights records by the 53-member commission, he was refused further entry to the country.

Mr. Copithorne, who served in the Canadian embassy in Tehran from 1959-61 and now teaches at the University of British Columbia, is due to draw up his own report for the commission which begins its annual six-week meeting in Geneva on March 18.

At the news conference, he declined to give any assessment of the Iranian rights situation pendiog completion of the report, which he said would be based not only on his visit but oo informatioo from many sources outside Iran.

Asked if he was likely to concur with the strongly critical conclnsions of his predecessor, he said his mandate was to report on the situation over the past 12 months and to assess whether conditions bad improved.

"We are not talking about black and white. We may be talking about an evolution," he added.

U.S. winter storm dumps misery in east

PHILADELPHIA (R) — The sixth major storm of winter launched a snrprise attack on a weather-weary eastern United States Friday, dumping snow deep into the south and threatening to break seasonal records in the northeast.

Winter storm warnings blanketed the region and more than 15 cenimetres of snow had fallen on parts of the east by the afternoon. Total accumulations were forecast to reach up to 30 cm along coastal New Jersey, New York and New England, and 45 cm in Maine.

"Mother nature has not been nice to the (Washington) D.C. area," said Rose Falcone, of Alexandria, Virginia. "It is a mess. Schools are closed, the stores are bare," she said.

The storm turned travel for the President's Day holiday weekend into a snow-choked nightmare as commuters left work early and accidents snarled traffic from Nashville to Boston.

Strong winds were forecast to cause near-blizzard conditions overnight along the east coast of Massachusetts, the national weather service said, urging travelers to stay at bome.

In rural Northfield, Minnesota, police said an elderly couple froze to death Thnrsday close to their farmhouse while searching for their blind dog. Helen and Elmer Mahowald, aged 79 and 80, had lived on the farm for 54 years.

Police found their bodies in a snow-drifted cornfield about 200 yards from their bome on Thursday, dead of exposure. Their dog Rex was found alive near the front door.

Officials began the now-familiar ritual of closing schools and shoppers rushed to grocery stores to stock up. The storm also closed Baltimore-Washington international airport, and forced flight cancellations or delays along the east coast.

Temperatures were forecast to plunge after the storm, with wind chills of zero (minus 18c) or lower expected in regions including the North Carolina mountains and Washington D.C. Freeze warnings were also issued for northern Florida.

The snowfall blasted through the previous seasonal record of 205 cm in Danbury, Connecticut, setting a new total of 207 cm, the weather service said.

The storm also closed in on seasonal records in Providence, Rhode Island, and Hartford, Connecticut, and Philadelphia.

Before Friday's storm, this winter ranked as New York's 10th snowiest on record with 130 cm, competing against the winter of 1947-1948, with 160 cm.

"If we get better than 23 cm today, we'll pop into No. 2. It's pretty much guaranteed we'll break the record this year after today's event," said George McKillop of the national weather service.

In Nashville, Tennessee, early morning commuters were suprised by a sbeet of ice under a light snowfall that moved in around midnight. Harried police estimated at least 70 accidents had occurred but no fatalities were reported.

Temperatures were below freezing over much of the southeast.

Five arrested after Beirut building collapse

BEIRUT (AFP) — Police arrested five people suspected of causing a four-storey building to collapse in Beirut with the loss of 14 lives, the official Lebanese news agency ANI said Saturday.

The Beirut examining magistrate, Said Mirza, was questioning the suspects following an outcry over the deaths of people trapped in the city centre building which had been due for demolition under a post-war redevelopment plan.

The building came down Thursday in the impoverished Wadi Abu Jmil neighbourhood, trapping workers removing architectural ornaments before it was torn down by the Solidere development company.

Most of the casualties were Lebanese and included members of the Ayad family, who were squatting in the building demanding money to leave.

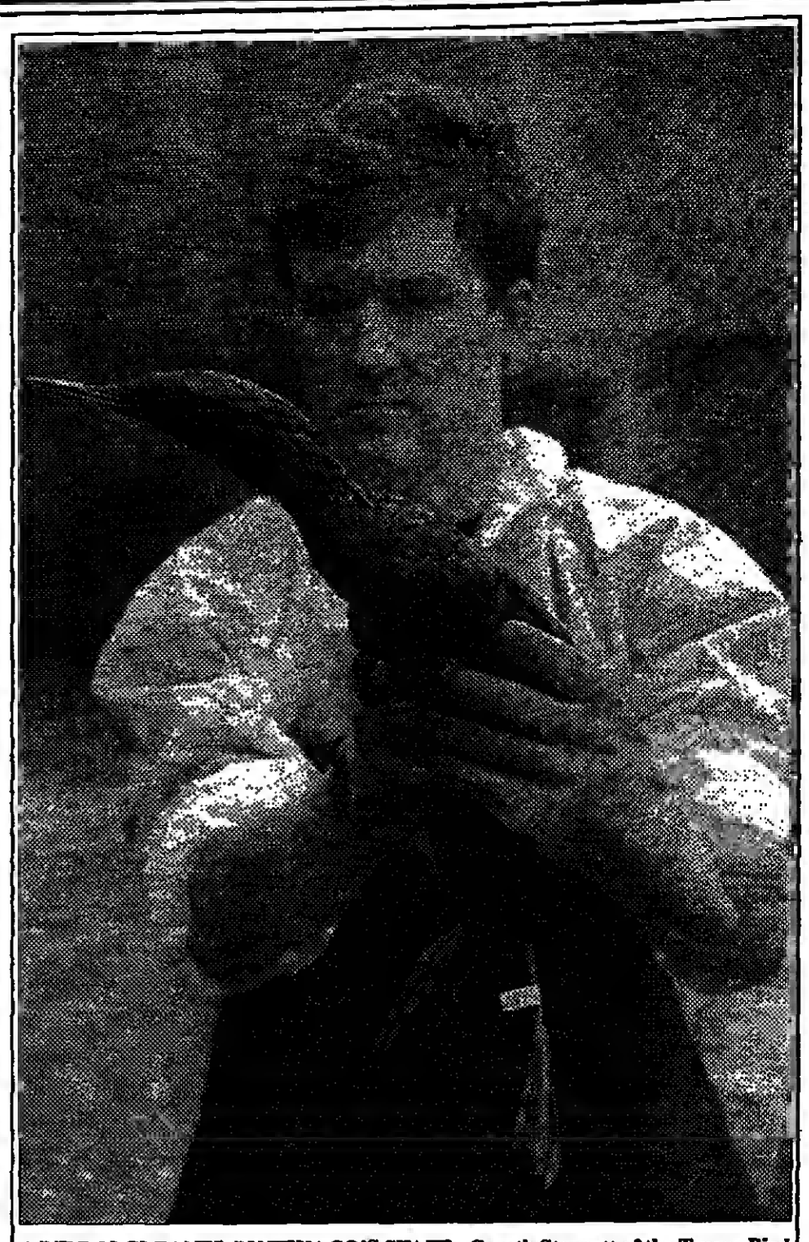
Solidere, in which Prime Minister Rafik Hariri is a major shareholder, has torn down hundreds of buildings in central Beirut and paid nearly $200 million in compensation to residents, mostly squatters and those displaced by the 1975-90 civil war.

On Wednesday it evacuated the Shibli building, but the Ayad family refused to leave. "They were still waiting to receive compensation," a neighbour said.

A company source, who declined to be named, described it as an "accident" while MPs and politicians heaped blame on Solidere.

Pope receives Hariri

VATICAN CITY (AFP) — Pope John Paul II met Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri bere Saturday and discussed a Vatican-sponsored synod that called for the withdrawal of both Israeli and Syrian troops from Lebanon. The call in December triggered a wave of protest from Muslim and pro-Syrian leaders in Lebanon, where 35,000 Syrian troops are deployed over two-thirds of the country while 1,000 Israeli soldiers occupy a southern border zone. The protesters rejected any comparison between Syrian and Israeli troops, viewing Syria's deployment as essential for security in Lebanon.



A BIRD IS CLEANED BY TEXACO'S STAFF: Gareth Stennett of the Texaco Bird Center Saturday holds an oil covered Red Throated diver. The bird was caught-up in oil which leaked from the grounded supertanker Sea Empress (Reuters photo)

King Fahd says he is in good health, thanks Arab leaders

DUBAI (R) — King Fahd of Saudi Arabia said he was feeliog well and thanked Arab and Islamic leaders who bad inquired about his bealth after he fell ill last year.

"Thank God I am in good bealth," the 74-year-old monarch said in a television programme broadcast on Saturday by the London-based Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) monitored in Dubai.

Wearing a traditional white flowing robe, the king was speaking as he received former siamese twins who had their operation costs paid by him in 1987, MBC said.

"My indisposition was a normal one," the king added.

The official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said the meeting took place on Friday in the holy city of Mecca, where the king is spending the last 10 days of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. He was reported to have suffered a stroke in November.

"I would like to thank my brothers the leaders of Arab, Islamic and friendly nations wbo inquired after me and to thank all citizens of Saudi Arabia...Thank God I am in good bealth."

On Jan. 1, the king handed over the affairs of state to his half-brother and beir apparent, Crown Prince Abdullab, while be rested and recuperated from his stroke.

Earlier this week, the king presided over a cabinet meeting for the first time since falling ill in November

Kurdish regions representatives omitted from Iraqi parliament

BAGHDAD (AFP) — The new Iraqi parliament to be elected in March will have 220 deputies, dropping the 30 seats normally reserved for representatives from the Kurdish regions, the interior ministry said Saturday.

The outgoing parliament has 250 seats, including 30 for representatives from the three provinces in northern Iraq which have been under Kurdish control in defiance of Baghdad since the end of the 1991 Gulf war.

But the three provinces have been barred from taking part io the March 24 polls — the first io seven years — after President Saddam Hussein decreed that the "elections in the autonomous regions of Kurdistan be postponed until things have returned to normal."

Interior Minister Mohammad Zammam Abdul Razzak told the media "the new assembly will have 220 seats."

Under a new electoral law, President Saddam could renew the mandate of the 30 existing deputies or appoint new representatives for the region.

Mr. Abdul Razzak added that candidates' names would be published three weeks before the polls, March 3, when the electoral campaign opens and that they would each be given equal media time.

Outgoing deputy speaker of parliament, Ghanem Aziz Khadduri, said Wednesday that four candidates would compete for each seat in the assembly.

Candidates must be 18 years old, have a junior high school diploma, and "believe in the principles of the July 17, 1968 revolution."

Court in Ne'mat's trial hears key witness

By Ghalia Alul
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Court of First Instance judge Tawfiq Al Qaisi has adjourned to Marcb 2 the trial of Al Hayat case in which the London-based Arabic newspaper and its correspondent in Amman stand accused of violating two articles in the Press and Publications Law.

In a session held on Thursday, the court heard the testimony of a key witness, President of the Jordan Press Association (JPA) Suleiman Qudah.

Mr. Qudah told the judge that his organisation had no intention of pressing charges against Al Hayat and journalist Salameh Ne'mat over an article published on Sept. 21 alleging that 42 journalists, a cabinet member and businessmen were on the Iraqi government's payroll.

In that article Mr. Ne'mat quoted "informed and official sources" as saying that after defection to Jordan of Gen. Hussein Kamel on Aug. 8, Iraq was attempting to recruit Jordanian journalists and to revive all pro-Baghdad forces in the Kingdom by offering gifts to create a trend that runs counter to the official Jordanian position towards Iraq.

Earlier last month, Mr. Ne'mat pleaded innocent to all charges pressed against bim by the Public Prosecutor Jamal Zu'bi.

The charges included overlooking objectivity, honesty and accuracy in reporting news, harming national unity, inciting crime and planting seeds of hatred and division among members of society. He was detained on Oct. 3 but was released on bail three days later. The trial opened mid Dec.

In his testimony before prosecutor Zu'bi, Mr. Qudah said Al Hayat article was damaging to journalists and demanded that legal action be taken against the newspaper and its correspondent.

"As president of the JPA, I file a complaint against Mr. Ne'mat, Mr. Khazen and the publisher of Al Hayat newspaper. I demand that legal actions be taken against them and reserve my right to seek compensation for moral damage caused by the article," he said adding that for a report like Mr. Ne'mat's to be published, there had to be an irrevocable support of claim.

However, in Thursday's session Mr. Qudah said that be and his association did not intend to file complaints against Mr. Ne'mat or his chief editor.

"As president of JPA, I do not intend to file a complaint against Mr. Ne'mat; the article slandered no particular journalist," he said.

Another key witness, columnist Tareq Masarweh, did not show up at court for the third time running, although he had demanded in one of his articles published in Al Rai daily that Mr. Ne'mat be prnsecuted and expressed willingness to sue the journalist and the chief editor of Al Hayat.

COLUMN 10

French gambler pays 22-tonne tax bill

PARIS (R) — A Frenchman, miffed by a demand for tax on gambling winnings, rented a convoy of armoured vans to pay his 3.7 million franc ($730,000) debt in one-franc coins weighing 22 tonnes. "We were a bit surprised," Danielle Le Faveur, tax collector in the town of viarmes north of Paris, told Renters. "But we greeted him with a smile. He paid his taxes in time." With abont 10 policemen deployed for security, the man, a retired industrialist, turned up in viarmes with three rented brink's vans containing 3,730,606 one-franc coins in 920 sacks. The coins are worth about 20 U.S. cents each. Identified only as Jean-Marie C., he told the daily Le Figaro he was "not acting in a spirit of vengeance. It's true I didn't like a refusal to give me more time to pay ... My gesture is symbolic. The franc is the monetary unit of France."

Mexican makes VW Beetle out of record players

MEXICO CITY (R) — A retired Mexican factory worker has cobbled together a Volkswagen Beetle out of 2,142 record players in a bid to enter the record books, local radio RED reported. Martin Gutierrez Sandoval, a 70-year-old who spent his working life making record player turntables, registered the hi-fidelity beetle for the "feats of man" category in the Guinness Book of Records, it said. His bizarre effort appears to be the latest sign of record-breaking fever sweeping Mexico. Making everything from enormons shrimp cocktails to giant cups of coffee, about 40 attempts have been made to get into the Guinness book of records in Mexico recently, the station said.

Bulgarian thieves no slick operators

SOFIA (R) — Thieves who tried to siphon diesel oil from an underground pipeline triggered an environmental alert in Bulgaria's Black Sea port of Varna after oil leaked into the city's water supplies. The leakage occurred after thieves attached a tap to an underground pipeline that carries oil from varna to Bulgaria's largest oil refinery Neftohim. A Neftohim spokeswoman said an organised group had apparently tried to set up an illegal petrol station, siphoning off oil from the pipeline to sell at lower prices. "This is the third such attempt in this area," she said.

U.S. Policeman slips back to comatose state after surgery

CHATTANOOGA, Tennessee (R) — A police officer who emerged from more than seven years of silence slipped back into a semi-comatose state after surgery but was able to communicate non-verbally, doctors said. Officer Gary Dockery made no "spontaneous attempts" after the surgery Thursday to combat pneumonia to speak or to repeat his 18-hour talking spree on Monday that broke 7 1/2 years of silence, his physician, Dr James Folkening, said. "Mr. Dockery has not made any attempts to verbally communicate since the ventilator was removed this morning," Folkening said. "His eyes are open and he is responding to people when they speak to bim by moving his eyes," he said.